The Mystery of the Sandalwood Boxes

HARRIET PYNE GROVE

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—and as a climax to the entertainment, she brought out the six sandalwood boxes.

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The Mystery of the Sandalwood Boxes

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"The Strange Likeness," "The Merry Lynn Series," "The Greycliff Girls' Series," "The Phantom Treasure," "The Secret of Steeple Rocks," etc.

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THE MYSTERY OF THE SANDALWOOD BOXES

CHAPTER I.

SIX SANDALWOOD BOXES.

AUDREY CRAIG opened a drawer of the bureau and smiled to see how Moti had arranged it. There were the six sandalwood boxes in a row. Of course, Moti would put them together. It was significant, too, that she had left a space next to them. True enough, she would propably receive another before long, unless they stopped coming. This was April. It would be in a few weeks, then.

Audrey was glad that house-cleaning was over, so far as her room was concerned. She had told Moti that she did not care how she fixed the drawers. She could change them if she liked. Only her desk was to be left undisturbed. To that, after laying

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away her gloves and folding her silk scarf, Audrey went; but she felt lazy after a day at school. She would put off going through it and write a letter to Cam instead,—after she raised a window. My, how stuffy it was!

But when Audrey went to the window, opening it to the fresh April air, she noticed something of a commotion next door in the house that had been closed so long. Some one must be moving in. Shades were up; windows were open; a door banged, and Audrey heard gay voices from across the hedge. There stood a moving van by the curb.

"Say, Nance, the dear old piano got here without falling to pieces. Tell him where to put it, won't you?"

The girl outside was calling to one within, while she and a dark-haired boy were gathering up some chairs that had been set upon the sidewalk. The men carried in the piano. A little girl of about ten came running out to help with the chairs. It was beginning to sprinkle a little.

Instead of being worried, they all seemed full of fun. Audrey could hear them laughing. "Give me that list, Retta," called the boy, running up the steps of the porch and meeting the older girl on the

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porch. "Go upstairs and see if I got the rugs down in the right rooms. I want to hustle the furniture that goes up there before Mom comes. I told Dad to take her around somewhere for something to eat first. She was ready to drop."

This was all quite interesting to Audrey, who did not realize that she was listening until the girl happened to glance in Audrey's direction and gave Audrey a little gesture of "isn't this a mess?" with a friendly grin. Then indeed Audrey blushed, bowed, and drew back, ashamed of having shown so much curiosity. What would Cousin Serena have thought? Cousin Serena could *be* curious and take means of gratifying that curiosity, but to *show* it was to descend to the depths of degradation.

That was a jolly family. Audrey took one more peep as she heard an especially merry shout from the boy. A respectable but obviously long used Ford sedan was drawing up beyond the truck, which was now almost empty. From the Ford there appeared "Mom" and "Dad," attractive and energetic people, who hurried into the house surrounded by their family, all eager to show them, as Audrey could plainly observe, how much had been accomplished in their absence.

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Audrey closed the window, except for about two inches, and went back to her desk. Wouldn't it be fun if she could get acquainted with these young folks? But it was probably out of the question. Cousin Serena would have been shocked to hear so much loud conversation outside of the house. Besides, she would have to make the first call, and she never would have the courage to do it.

At the desk, Audrey drummed with her fingers instead of writing. Then she ran to throw open the other window, the one that opened on the back garden, instead of on the side of the interesting house. She was thinking of how shut in she had felt in this house after the wide-open Craig bungalow in India. The climate was different, yes; but Cousin Serena's house would be shut up anywhere, Audrey thought. If it were not cold, it would remain shut to keep out the dust, or to keep the sun from the rugs, or something.

But the four years had gone some way. There were always the books and her lessons. She *was* grateful for that library, and she liked to do well in school. There she had a sort of companionship anyway. Once, soon after she had come to America, several little girls had come to see her. But Cousin

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Serena had remained in the room all the time, shy and not feeling at home herself, she had not known how to entertain them. Cousin Serena had given them some books, at which they looked, talking in subdued tones till time for the girls to go. Cousin Serena had not thought it "necessary" for Audrey to return the call and the girls had never returned. She was almost twelve then.

Restlessly Audrey walked around the room. She looked in the large, square mirror, above the marble and the linen of her bureau. Her hair needed braiding, but Moti would do that. She had a notion to run down into the garden to look at the white violets and see how they were coming on. But it was wet and Cousin Serena would make some objection. She might as well write that letter to Camilla. There were hard lessons to get that night.

Audrey Craig, sixteen, of suburban New York City, was as settled in the home of her cousins, Mr. George Avery and Miss Serena Avery, as four years could make her. But Audrey had scarcely taken root. She was more like one of those air plants upon a live oak tree. Appreciative she was, for she realized now more than she had at first how disturbing it must have been to both her cousins,

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and particularly to Miss Serena Avery, to have their quiet routine of life broken in upon by the coming of an orphaned child and her "maid," as Cousin George called Moti.

Moti had been her ayah, both nurse and maid in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Craig in India. Audrey had always had Moti. To Moti Audrey was the most precious person in the world and in that sense Audrey had been mothered; but Moti was not demonstrative. Audrey felt her care, but she did not know the depth of Moti's feeling, hence the lonely heart of the child. Anxious as Audrey had been to come to the land of her father and mother, its customs were so different and the atmosphere of the home which she had entered so cold, that she sometimes longed for India.

"Dear Cam," wrote Audrey. "Here I am, home from school as usual, waiting for Moti to come in and tell me what to wear for dinner! Doesn't that sound wonderful? I have two dresses, you know. But Cousin Serena insists on my being 'properly dressed' for dinner. O Cam, how I wish that you would walk in! It would give Cousin Serena nervous prostration though, so I'd better wish that I were walking in on you. I'm perfectly sure that

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your mother and father would be glad to see me. even if the Prince of Wales himself were there. It is great that your father has that furlough. I know that you all are having a great time of it. It has been hard on you, too, to be away at school in England with them in India. But then, Cam, it's very different when your father and mother aren't in the world at all and you know—forgive me for writing that. I get lonesome sometimes; you know how it is. But I get over it, and I have so much school work that I haven't time to fret. It's going to be fine weather here, too. I didn't have much fun this winter, of course, because I don't know anybody much of my age and Cousin Serena is afraid to have me do anything like skating, though Moti could go with me. But now we drive more in the car and the country is lovely.

"I'll make a paragraph at last. This isn't the way I write a theme. Some folks are moving into that house next door that has been so mysteriously shut up. At least I like to think that it is mysterious, and Cousin Serena acts as if it were. But then she does that. I surely like their looks and I'm going to smile at them if I don't dare do anything else. If I ever meet them I will tell you about them. But

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I suppose you know just crowds of girls by this time.

"Yes, my birthday comes pretty soon. If another sandalwood box or anything else mysterious comes, I will let you know and tell you what is in it. No, I wrote to Uncle long ago, at the very first, to ask him if he knew of any one who might send them. Father and Mother just thought that some one who was grateful to Father was sending me gifts, but they have kept coming since I came here, as you well know. It does look as if the same person sent them all, doesn't it?

"What do you think? Uncle will have a furlough next year and he says that he is coming for me,—*for* me! I don't know where he intends to take me, and I don't dare ask, for fear it is just some little trip. But it is something to think about. I hope, of course, that he will take me at least to England, and then I shall see you, Cammy!

"Don't forget your old Audrey, Cam, no matter how many nicer girls you know. Didn't we clasp hands over my little green monkey idol and swear eternal friendship? By the way. I keep that out of Moti's sight, because she told me once that she did not like to think the thoughts which she used to

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have before the missionaries converted her to Christianity. Poor Moti! But she seems perfectly happy, so far as any one can ever tell. You know Moti. You wouldn't believe how Americanized (Did I spell that right?) she is, and how well she speaks English. She still calls Cousin Serena the "mem-sahib" and, indeed, often calls me Sahiba, or Miss Sahiba, but I almost perished inside the other day when she was telling me about the grocery boy in a fight with a street gamin and how the grocery boy knocked the other one down and 'beat it'. Perhaps you don't know what that means, Cam. It's American for hurrying away. I think that I heard it in India, though, *possibly* from Father! If Moti had ever heard him say anything, she would think it classical. How I wish that I could ever hear him speak again! But I shall some day.

"Speaking of 'classical,' I'm studying hard on my Latin, and my mathematics, too, to make Uncle proud. Cousin Serena sends all my reports to him!

"I meant to stop when I wrote you not to forget me, and here I go rambling on. Tell me just what you are doing and more about the fun you girls have.

"Ever your loving AUDREY."

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Audrey closed her letter, put it in an envelope and directed it to the proper address in England. Then she hurried to dress. Moti had not come in. "I'm getting lazy anyhow," said Audrey to her pretty image in the glass," and imagine that I must have a maid like the uppities. Come in," she continued, for there was a soft rap at her door. A short, dark, rather plmp woman entered.

"Moti, I was just saying to myself that I am getting spoiled with all that you have been doing for me ever since we came to this country. You did enough for me before, but you had Mother, too, and everybody to do some things for. Cousin Serena has plenty to keep you busy here, too, and I must not let you wait on me the way you do. See, I have my hair braided nicely."

Audrey turned around to show Moti her heavy, brown braids, worn in an old-fashioned style. "I wish that Cousin Serena would let me fix my hair the way the other girls at school do. It makes me feel funny. But I wouldn't know how to do it, I suppose, anyhow."

"I will learn," said Moti. "Do you want to cut your hair?"

"No. Some of them have their hair long now."

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"You will soon be sixteen. You can wear your hair like the ladies, then."

That was a new idea to Audrey. "I'll think about it, Moti. Perhaps it would help me to get over being so awkward with the girls. I can't get over feeling so different!"

"The house over there has been sold," Moti volunteered, as she brought Audrey's plain dark blue silk frock from the closet.

"I saw them moving in," said Audrey. "I did not notice anything going on when I came home, though I suppose that they must have moved some things in earlier in the day; but afterwards I looked out from here. There are some girls about my age, I think. Perhaps Cousin Serena will let me get acquainted with them."

Moti shook her head in the negative. "Not to come here. The mem-sahib's nerves do not want them. But you may see them in other places. I will go with you."

Audrey shook her head also in the negative. "I'll not do anything underhanded, Moti. I have to obey Cousin Serena while I am still here. Still, I do carry it too far or I would know other girls at school; and if these girls at school are as good as they look,

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there is no real reason why I should not try to know them, at least. Perhaps Cousin Serena will be different with neighbors." But as Audrey spoke, she knew the word "neighbor" meant little in a city, or even in this suburb of the city, which was rather closely built up.

"Everybody your neighbor to help," said Moti, "but not safe to know everybody for friend."

"Smart old Moti," laughed Audrey. "Well, I hope that I find these girls my neighbors in both ways, though I don't see how I could be of any help to them."

"Daughter of doctor sahib the—a—very nice girl," said Moti, looking with brown eyes full of affection into Audrey's deep blue ones.

"Thanks, Moti. I'll try to deserve that. Now for dinner. I'm starved. What has Nora got that's good tonight?"

"Roast cow, potatoes,—other things." Moti pressed her lips together. She kept out of Nora's way as a rule, for Nora had no use for a "haythen," and she could not be persuaded that Moti was as good a Christian as she was. Moti thought that she was a better one by keeping to the Hindu rule of not defiling oneself by eating of the "sacred

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cow." But it was difficult to adjust matters of diet between the servants of this household. Nora was Catholic, Moti a converted Hindu, and no one knew what Durga was, except that he, too, was a Hindu.

Audrey left Moti putting away her school apparel, while she went downstairs to her cousin.

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CHAPTER II.

ROAST COW AND POTATOES.

MODESTLY Audrey went into the dining-room, where Cousin Serena was just being seated and Cousin George was pulling out his chair. Durga seated Audrey, to whom Cousin Serena nodded. "I heard you coming downstairs, Audrey," she said, "so we did not wait."

Cousin George was adjusting his glasses over a somewhat prominent nose. But Cousin George had a good face, even if he were a little more dignified at home than occasion required. He looked at Audrey over his glasses, while they waited for Durga to bring the soup, and asked her how the work at school had gone. He always asked her that.

Audrey spread her linen napkin properly as she replied: "Very well, Cousin George. Miss Snow assigned a wretchedly long lesson in history for tomorrow, but the Latin teacher is sick and we have only fifteen lines in advance. There is a theme for

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next Monday. What would you write about, Cousin George?"

Durga set an old-fashioned china soup-plate before Miss Serena.

"I should think that they would give you topics," said Cousin George.

"There is a list in the textbook that we may use if we like, 'The haunted house, a storm and what it did, my most thrilling experience, a *birthday experience*,'—that is all right, Durga, never mind." Audrey broke off to say the last in a low voice to Durga, who had splashed the soup a little as he placed it before Audrey. Durga seemed nervous for a few days, if one dared to call it that.

Cousin Serena never paid any attention to any accident at the table, though servants might look for reproof afterward. But dinner was a formal rite, and very pleasantly did such a meal in her home usually move off, though Audrey rather dreaded it sometimes, or its formality, on the few occasions when they entertained company.

"Write about India. Travel and history are good for girls to know. I suppose that your themes are read in class."

"Some of them, Cousin George."

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But Cousin Serena had heard enough of school and themes. "What is the news in the city today, George?" she inquired, accepting a wafer from the plate passed by Durga.

Audrey finished her soup without any further part in the conversation. "Is this real?" she asked herself. She saw Cousin George, dignified, a little heavy, though he was not a large man, deftly carving the roast with hands that did no harder work than a department in the bank might require. But his hazel eyes looked a little tired tonight. His face, never very expressive, was without animation.

Cousin Serena was taller than her brother and heavier, in more ways than one, for as Audrey sometimes almost guiltily thought in her heart, Cousin Serena was dull! How *could* anybody be like that, with all that there was in the world to think about, or do, if you had the chance? She really was not very much interested in what her brother told her about the bank and affairs in Wall Street, though Audrey herself could make little out of that.

Cousin Serena's placid face looked across at her brother just as it did every night and Audrey knew that her thoughts were more on how the roast was cooked and whether dessert would turn out as it

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should than on what Cousin George related in his dry way. Cousin Serena was older than he, with gray hair, light blue eyes, a round face surmounted by one of the coiffeurs of the ninety's. But if Cousin Serena's face and name were placid, she could be critical and fretful enough upon occasion. And on those occasions Audrey had to remember how good it was of her to have Audrey there at all. At least Audrey thought so. She did not know that her way was well paid, that the Averys had the services of both Moti and Durga without expense, and that had it not been for her arrival the brother and sister would have had to curtail expenses and reduce their style of living because of certain losses.

But it was a home, a well-established one, and for all of Miss Avery's notions a very safe one for Audrey, if not immediately inspiring. The table with its fine china in excellent taste, the heavy chandelier above, the high ceiling, the walls with the rich paper that had been cleaned but not renewed for years, the high, marble-topped sideboard, old-fashioned, but massive and elegant, the heavy chairs and table, of dark walnut, the thick rug of mixed colors,—of all these Audrey was conscious, but with a feeling that

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she did not belong to it all, or that none of this was hers.

Audrey, however, was a little morbid tonight. By the time she had eaten her roast meat and potatoes with the rest, which happened to include a particularly good salad and her favorite dessert, she felt more content. Then Cousin George laid a friendly hand on her shoulder as they went from the dining-room into the hall, Cousin George who always concealed his feelings, if he had any, and said, "You are growing up into a pretty girl, Audrey, yes, a very pretty girl. Write about India, Audrey. Give them a thriller, if you know any. I always wanted to go to India myself."

If Audrey had not been too shy she would have hugged him on the spot and Cousin George would probably have liked it very much, though it would have been embarrassing. Poor Cousin George, perhaps he hated it, too, always doing the same thing day after day, with Cousin Serena to tell him what to do. But then Cousin George did not always stay at home, either.

More Victorian furniture was in the parlor. But if it was not as graceful as that of some other periods, it was of excellent material all through and

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not of a veneer only. And the big chairs were very comfortable, the Persian rug of handsome colors. Audrey sat down under a hidious painting of Cousin George as a little boy of three and wondered, as she had often wondered before, how they could like their uninteresting life, as it seemed to her. She sat quietly, with folded hands, waiting politely for anything further that Cousin Serena might have to say to her. This was the invariable evening custom. Audrey knew that she could soon escape upstairs to her room and her studies.

Cousin George finished his evening paper. Cousin Serena, on the other side of a small table, laid down the embroidery that she had picked up. She had refrained from talking, not to disturb her brother. "Going out this evening, George?" she asked, for her brother had risen, adjusting his tie a little and making other preliminary moves.

"Yes, Serena. There is a meeting, a committee meeting. I shall not be home till late. Goodnight, Audrey. I should write on India if I were you." With great dignity Cousin George left the room. Audrey heard him talking to Durga in the hall. Durga was probably helping Cousin George into his top coat and handing him his hat.

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"I have some hard lessons, Cousin Serena. Don't you think that I'd better get to work?" asked Audrey.

"Yes, Audrey."

"Is there something that I can do for you, Cousin Serena, first?"

"Thank you, no. I shall work a little on this linen, read a little and probably retire early. My nerves have been a little upset today. I will send Moti to you at about half-past nine, as usual."

Audrey went out into the hall and found Durga apparently arranging some things there. When he saw her, he came toward her. "Did you intend, Miss Sahiba, to remind me that your birthday is almost here?"

"I shouldn't wonder if I did, Durga, but just for fun." Audrey's eyes sparkled and she laughed quietly as she looked into the dark eyes of the Hindu servant.

"I was startled and my hand shook a little, but I can not tell you why. Sometimes there is a little danger when gifts of value are sent, and if any one should offer you a present when I am not here, do not take it, do—not—take—it."

"Do you mean on the street, or some one at the

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door here? I am not allowed to answer the bell."

"Anywhere."

"Why is it, Durga, that the queer birthday gift always comes through you—since I came to America? I wish that you would tell me who sends these gifts. Sometimes I think that I ought not to take them. Why do you always bring them?"

"I can not tell you. I am sorry."

"Well," urged Audrey, who had never been so boldly frank with Durga before. "Well, does the person who wants to give you the presents send them to you, or give them to you himself—or herself?"

"Sends them. I can tell you that."

"Is the person still in India, or is he in this country now?"

"Are you sure that it was some one in India who gave you the first presents?"

"No. But I thought so, and the sandalwood boxes, you know, and then the things are of my India!"

"So they are. But I can not tell you, either what I know or what I think. It is convenient, since I am here, for him who chooses to send you gifts to send them through me. He does not want it known, so I do not disturb the secret The mem-Sahib,—she does not know?"

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"No. I took your advice, Durga, the other time that you talked to me. There is no use in bothering Cousin Serena or Cousin George. Uncle always sends me something, too, so if I wear anything different or show her some thing and say it is from India, she thinks that Uncle sent it. I am so sure, someway, that everything comes, first, at least, from India, that I have not worried about telling anything that was not true. But what has upset you, Durga about this?"

Durga put his finger to his lips and looked toward the parlor door. They heard Miss Serena drop something. She might be rising to leave the parlor. With a smile at Durga, Audrey started toward the stairs and went on to her room, while Durga left the hall by way of the dining-room.

Never did Audrey feel less like studying. The mysterious Durga! Sometimes she felt sure that he belonged in some way to her old life in India. Then again, she was not sure. Durga had not come with them. She was sure that Moti was telling the truth when she said that she had never seen him before. Yet Audrey herself imagined a certain familiarity about his regular and really fine features.

How could a high-caste Hindu like Durga take this

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place in the household? He had arrived without any explanation from her cousins, shortly after she and Moti had become settled in the home. But she overheard Cousin George telling Cousin Serena that he "hired him for almost nothing." "I thought since we had one Hindu in the house we might as well have another. I liked his looks and since Craig insists on sending enough to pay me for keeping a man, considerably more than this man costs, we shall be quite comfortable again."

Cousin Serena at this suggested that the man might be a "Thug" and murder them all, but as Cousin George laughed at that and the idea of thrift appealed particularly to Cousin Serena, Durga was retained.

Audrey was a little afraid of Durga at first, not because of his race, to which she was accustomed, but because of his expression and manner, like that of royalty deposed. He evinced no interest in her or in Moti, but he was perfect as a servant and Audrey thought that this quiet, uncommunicative household suited Durga. She wondered a little about her Uncle's paying for Durga's services, also, why a man like Durga should serve for "almost nothing," but she never thought then of asking him any questions.

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Not even in India would she have done that, much less here in this correct household.

Durga appeared to be entirely indifferent to Audrey and to everything except his duties, which he performed with such dignity and despatch. On the occasion of her first birthday in America he had knocked at the door of her room after she had begun her evening study and handed her a package. "I was directed," said he, "to give this to the young Miss Sahib, without the knowledge of any one else."

Audrey never forgot the serious look of Durga's deep eyes. She took the package and thanked Durga. Then, as he hesitated, she added. "It is not necessary for any one else to know, except Moti." With a bow Durga departed.

Twice more the same performance was repeated, and the last time Durga had stopped to say that he hoped the manner of receiving the present was still not known to any one. He looked uneasy, Audrey thought. Soberly she assured him that her cousins were not curious about India or anything that she had from there. "My uncle always sends me a package," she added.

This statement seemed to give Durga relief, though, to be sure, he knew about the package from

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her uncle, which was left in her room for her. Neither remembrance was sure to arrive exactly upon her natal day, but the mysterious one could be counted on within a few days, usually before her birthday.

Audrey took off her silk dress and made herself comfortable in her loose negligee, which Moti had laid upon the bed, ready for her. She opened her history and began to read, but it was very stupid right at this point. What did Durga mean about there being danger sometimes? Could he mean anything more than danger of valuable things being stolen? And was this next gift to be valuable? and if so, how did Durga know? And why was she not to accept anything except through Durga? Strange things happened in India sometimes. Could there be an enemy? If so, whose enemy? Once Durga was gone for several days. He had had an accident, he said. Oh, for pity's sake, why couldn't she get her lesson! This horrible history? Well, she would get her math first. She could keep her mind on that because she had to.

She wished that no one but her uncle would send her anything. No, that was not true. She did like this lovely mystery of not being sure that anything

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beside her uncle's gift would come, and of wondering what it would be, and who sent it, and why it was sent. Even if it were so stupid here, with nobody but Cam, way off, to whom she could pour out her heart, *somebody* thought that she was worth remembering!

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CHAPTER III.

AUDREY'S NEIGHBORS

For several days the big house beyond the hedge continued to be the scene of lively operation. Audrey occasionally peeped out at her neighbors when she heard an especially ringing laugh, or saw them out in the yard. There they were making the most of such shrubbery and flowers as were already there, or busily planting seeds in new beds. She did not happen to meet any of them, for Durga drove her to the private school, which she attended and often came for her, though not always.

Mornings at the Avery home had a regular program. The car was ready before breakfast, standing in the drive. Durga served them at a seven-thirty breakfast. Audrey supposed that he ate his own breakfast next. She made ready for school, but Durga usually drove Mr. Avery to his train before he took her to school, unless there was a plan for both brother and sister to drive to the city. But as

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a rule Mr. Avery preferred the train. The car was too recent an addition to their life to tempt him and the distance not agreeable in bad weather.

Meanwhile Audrey had not failed to arouse some interest in the young people next door. "Who's the girl in the vault next to us, Nance?" inquired the dark-haired boy whom Audrey had noticed that first day. He was standing on a step-ladder as he spoke, putting up the curtains in the living room.

Nancy Russell, who had been handing up the curtains, broke out into a little laugh at his speech. "How should I know?" she replied. "So that is what you call the house next door?"

"Those two dark servants go around as if some one were in the last stages, anyway. The Irish one is the only person over there that looks human."

"Except the girl, Verne."

"Oh, yes; except the girl. But she doesn't look as if she could call her soul her own."

"Verne, my son," reprovingly said Mrs. Russell, who sat near, slipping fresh, clean curtains into the rods, "there are some very fine, quiet people who live in an atmosphere of culture and refinement, and do not think it necessary to show that they are alive by shouting all over the place."

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"Nance," said Verne, grinning, "do you suppose that Mother means anything by that remark?"

"Certainly not," said Nance. "Poor mother. She ought to have had a chance with two or three kiddies of her own kind,—"

"Instead of the gang she has," Verne Russell finished. "But I'm surprised, Nance, to think that you and Retta have not already called, to borrow something, or carry over a dish of something."

"We never borrow, as you well know, Verne Russel, and as we have just moved into a new neighborhood, we shall wait until the neighbors call on us first."

"If they ever do."

"Then it will be just as well," said Mrs. Russell. "It is different in a city. We can be friendly, of course, if overtures are made, but after all, we make our own circle." Mrs. Russell sighed. "I suppose that we shall have to join a different church out here. I simply *could* not get to prayermeeting from here. We shall meet the best people in church, and if any of them like us we shall have friends."

"Listen to Mom! If 'any of them' like her, for instance! And I'm surprised at you, Mom, to join a church to have friends."

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Mrs. Russell smiled. She was not troubled about her boy's understanding what she meant.

"Give me that last curtain, Nance," said Verne, after he had climbed down from the step-ladder, placed it before another of the long windows, and hung the first curtain. "What possessed Dad to buy a house with such high ceilings anyhow? Now there is that handsome modern place just across the street." Verne began to whistle a little.

"Yes, Verne," said his sister, "and look at the price. Besides, there is a great deal more air in this place,—"

"And it will cost twice as much to heat, too."

"Your father bought this at a great bargain, children. It had been empty for a long time. They would not rent it."

"They could not, my dear Mother. But as for us, we don't care for spooks. Come one, come all. Don't worry, Mother, I'm not knocking this as much as it seems. Anything is better than this family in an apartment; and after we do all that we are going to do to this and prove to the whole neighborhood that the ghost story is a whopper, Pop can sell it for twice what he paid for it."

"Never, children, in my right mind, am I going to

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move from this spot," asserted Mrs. Russell, in a tone which would have shown any hearer where her children obtained their spirit.

"Poor little Mom," laughed Verne, "but I can think of circumstances which would make our mother change her mind."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," Mrs. Russell admitted.

"But we are not wanting to move, Mother," declared Nancy very firmly. "Whatever we may say in our frank and sincere way,"—here Nancy looked at Verne with a comical expression. "Whatever we say in criticism of this house, we all really like it. Moreover, it's big enough."

"I'll say it is," slangily said Verne. "Better shut up part of it, so Mom won't wear herself out."

"That is just what we are going to do. We're not going to use the third story at all except for storage and our own peculiar stunts. You can fit up a gym there if you want to. When we want to buy some more furniture, then we can each have a room to ourselves if we want it,—and take care of it ourselves, too!"

"I see that Mom has no chance at all now. Hail the new Russell manager-in-chief!" Verne, now sit-

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ting on top of the ladder to rest from his labors, bowed to Nancy and nearly fell off.

It had, indeed, been hard to squeeze this family into the city apartment where they had lived since coming to New York two years before. They had come from a small town where they had owned their own home and were acquainted with all their neighbors. A business opportunity had brought Mr. Russell. Then there were visions of university advantages, for all of the children, and other attractions in the great city.

The suburban street on which the Averys and the Russells lived was not so closely built up as is sometimes the case. The yards were small, but neat and pretty, separated from each other as a rule by hedges. The houses, for the most part, were tall red brick houses, massive, but of various sizes and shapes. A few more modern homes had been recently built among them.

Among the largest was the home recently acquired by the Russell family. It had been a white elephant on the hands of the dealers, which fact accounted for the reduction in price in itself, without the hazy story of a ghost. Few people were interested in a house so large, one not completely modern. Yet few

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of the modern houses were built so well. It would require considerable fuel and care to heat it; "but," said Mr. Russell, "we'll spread all over it in the summer, and heat only a part of it in winter. Bear that in mind when you choose your rooms."

It was their own. That was a great deal. Verne said that he intended to fix up a "bachelor apartment" on the third floor, and woe betide any female member of the family that had designs on the room he wanted! But with his older brother Rob, who was already in Columbia, he regularly occupied a room on the second floor, a big room where they had put twin beds and had their own book-cases and traps of various sorts. How fine it was to get the things out of storage that simply could not be crowded into the apartment. Even the boys were excited over this move, though Rob could do little because of his heavy work. It was Verne's spring vacation, really past the end of it, but he stayed on. The end of the front hall, near their room, was as big as a room, and had immense windows and a balcony. The heavy woodwork was such as they do not put in the modern houses.

"Intrinsically," said Robert, "this house is worth a good deal."

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Robert was twenty-one, Verne seventeen, only a year younger than Nancy, who was the oldest daughter. Then came Doretta, who was always called Retta. She was a little past fifteen, but was as tall and seemed as old as Audrey. Last were the twins, who were ten. They were Harry and Bil*lee*, though contrary to one's natural expectations, Bil*lee* was a little girl. She had named herself thus at the mature age of four, not liking her baptismal name at the time. Named Ethel for an aunt, she said that it did not match Harry, so she would be Bil*lee*. The name did seem to fit the child better than her own. In consequence the family gradually began to adopt it, with Harry, who had conferred with Billee over the matter first. Now she was Ethel only at school and upon formal occasions. To her family and playmates she was the merry Bil*lee*, her early pronunciation of Billy.

All this was to be found out by Audrey in due time. The whole undertaking was a great adventure for the Russells and in that spirit they happily met it. Father and Mother Russell, with the responsibility, had many quiet discussions upon ways and means before they dared buy a home; but the op-

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portunity came and an apartment for a family of that size was no economy.

Audrey's first acquaintance with her neighbors was introduced by Billee. The theme, which she did write on a phase of India, her lessons, and other things had rather absorbed Audrey's time; but one afternoon after school she was in the garden; "fussing," as she called it, with the flowers. One thing she and Cousin Serena had in common, a love for flowers. When the season permitted, Audrey enjoyed the small yard in the rear of the house more than anything else about the place.

Small as it was, the shrubbery was prettily massed, the flowers and bushes wandering along a winding path; and it boasted an artistic bird bath, a rustic seat under a fruit tree, and a pretty trellis for climbing roses. Audrey had put a large apron over her dress and was digging away with a trowel when she heard a child's voice. "We're going to have some of *them*," it said.

Audrey looked up, tucking back some wavy wisps of hair, and tossing back a long braid of her hair which would persist in trailing on the ground. There stood, close to the hedge, on the other side, a little girl.

"Oh, how do you do?" said Audrey, "do you like

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flowers?" She rose, and trowel in hand, she walked to the hedge.

"Yes. I think I *do!* I like the spring ones best, too. 'Aren't our lilacs pretty?" The child waved toward some beautiful bushes in full bloom that stood not far from the house. "Wait till I pick you some," and before Audrey could protest or ask her if her mother would want her to pick them, the child ran to the bushes and pulled several of the fragrant plumes from their branches.

"Oh, they are lovely, aren't they!" Audrey exclaimed, burying her nose in the cool blossoms. "Thank you,—but I'm afraid that you should not have picked them. Cousin Serena has very particular ideas about when we must or must not pick our flowers."

"Mother does not care. We have such loads of these." The sunny-haired child was looking at Audrey with bright eyes. "Is Cousin Serena the lady that lives here? I s'posed she was your mother."

"No. My mother is in heaven."

"Oh. I'm sorry. I *thought* it was funny that you were so pretty if—but I'd better not say that, I guess."

Audrey was amused. The compliment was not

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unpleasing, if it was hard on Cousin George and Cousin Serena. "Mr. and Mrs. Avery are my cousins and they took me into their home when my parents —died."

"That was nice of them, but you must be lonesome without any brothers or sisters. Didn't you ever have any, or do they live some other place?"

"I never had any. I have an uncle who is an English officer in India, and that is all."

Billee screwed up her small forehead and shook her head. Audrey looked at her smilingly. She was not shy with this sweet youngster. It was a pity that she had not had a sister! "You have a nice family, I see. What is your name?"

"Bil*lee* Russell; that is, I always have to tell people that my real name, the name I was baptized by, is Ethel. But when I was little I wanted to have a name that would match Harry's, you see. Harry is my twin."

"Why, how fine,—you have a twin. I did notice a little boy, but he is a little taller than you."

"Yes. Mother says that he's started to grow, but that I can catch up with him when I start."

"Do you want to catch up?"

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"Why, yes, of course. I have to do everything that Harry does."

"I think that it is nicer for boys to be bigger than girls and take care of them." Audrey said this purposely, for she rather felt from Billee's expression that Harry's growing taller was a sore point.

"Perhaps it is. I hadn't thought of that." Billee sighed.

"Then wouldn't it be funny for girls to do exactly what boys do?"

"I s'pose so. That is what Mother and the girls say. But I *do* wish that *I* was a boy, *too*!"

"I used to wish that when I was your age, but Father said that while he might enjoy a boy, he kind of loved me more than if I'd been one."

"That was just because you *were* a girl. But my mother and father love us all alike, though Mother says that she has a separate corner for each one and doesn't lump us all together. I shouldn't like that."

Mrs. Russell glancing out from the kitchen window, saw the conference by the hedge. "There is your chance, girls, if you want to make an acquaintance," said she, beating up some cream in a bowl.

Nancy, closing the oven door, for the roast needed further cooking, crossed the kitchen and looked out.

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"There's Billee by the hedge, Retta. Go out and take her cap or somthing. It's cool and it will be an excuse."

Retta needed no urging. Out she flew, and after reaching the back porch changed her pace to a decorous walk, between flower-beds, to where the ground sloped by the hedge. Audrey was smiling pleasantly as she waited, and Billee, seeing Audrey's look of recognition, turned to see who was coming. "I don't want to go in, Retta, please."

"You needn't. Just slip this over your head. Mother thinks it too cool for you. Have you made acquaintance with our neighbor?"

Audrey and Retta were smiling at each other as Billee exclaimed, "Oh, yes! This is my sister Retta, —I don't know your name, and Retta, it isn't Avery, 'cause they are not her father and mother at all!"

"My name is Audrey Craig, and I am ever so glad to know you. I have been noticing what good times you have together."

Audrey said this so naturally that Retta had no idea how much effort it was, or how Audrey both wanted and dreaded to meet the happy family next door.

"We have seen you, too, and wanted to get ac-

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quainted. You must come over some time soon. We are about settled now, though we shall be doing different things to the place all the time. We bought it, you know. Do come over to see us."

"Thank you. I want to, and I will if I can."

"Can't you always do what you want to?" asked Billee.

"Billee!" reproved Retta. "Nobody can, Billee; can you?"

"No," said the frank Billee, "but I should think anybody could go next door in the daytime."

"I think that I shall be able to do it, Billee," said Audrey, soberly.

"I'd like to have you tell us about your uncle in India when you come. Were you ever there?"

"Yes, I lived there."

"Oh, and that's where those queer,—those—"

"Sh-sh, Billee, you are such a little chatterbox. Give me a chance. Retta knew that Billee was about to make some comment on the Hindu servants and the point was to stop her.

"But *please* let me ask her if she was a missionary!"

"No, Billee, I wasn't a missionary, and neither was my father, though he really gave his life for

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India, too. I will tell you all about it, some time, if you *really* want to hear.

"I do. Now, Retta, you can talk. There's Harry!"

Billee scampered away as Harry, laden with small parcels from the surburban grocery, entered the Russell yard. But Audrey and Retta had no opportunity, for Moti was coming down the walk. "The mem-sahib says that dinner is early tonight," said Moti.

"All right, Moti. I'm sorry to be obliged to go in, Miss Russell, but you see how I would look for dinner," and Audrey looked down at her big apron, brandishing her trowel. "Cousin Serena likes to have me dress for dinner, you know."

"It must be a nuisance, but it is the proper thing to do, I suppose," replied Retta. "But I'm Retta, not Miss Russell, and I do hope that you will come over very soon."

As Audrey hurried up the walk into the kitchen, where a red-cheeked Nora was taking up the meal, or beginning to do so, she was thinking of her relations with her neighbors. That was the trouble. She thought she could manage very easily to call, but the return visits would be the trouble, and how *could* she

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tell them that Cousin Serena did not want her to have company! Audrey ran up the stairs in her hurry to be ready in time.

But she had some rights, didn't she, to live and know nice people? Audrey began to feel cross. Well, she would go, then let them come once and get frozen out by Cousin Serena,—no, this thing called for strategy! She would invite the two girls over some time when Cousin Serena went to her club! She would have them up in her room to look at her curios, and Moti would bring in some lemonade and cakes! Nora liked her, besides. She would just mention it to Nora after Cousin Serena had gone. Would that be wrong?"

Audrey was in too much of a hurry to decide then and there. Her hands needed more scrubbing than usual, of course! But Moti had every garment ready to slip over her head. Instead of braiding her hair again, Moti wound the braids around her head and tucked in the loose ends with hairpins.

"Why, Moti, that looks real nice!" she exclaimed. "I'll give you a recommendation as a lady's maid any time you want it!"

"When you grow tired of Moti, I'll want it."

"The idea! As if I'd ever grow tired of you! I

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was just joking. Let's think up a good way to do my hair that will be different." But as she spoke, Audrey hurried into the hall and felt like sliding down the bannisters to reach the parlor, whence issued Cousin George's bass tones. Wouldn't Durga be horrified if she did come hurtling down like the little girl she was at heart?

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CHAPTER IV.

THE EAGER WATCHER

AUDREY felt as if the atmosphere in that part of the world had grown warmer since she had met the two Russells. The rest of them spoke, too, when they met her, or nodded. There was not much opportunity to show friendliness for a few days, but Cousin Serena had not noticed the method of acquaintance, and for that Audrey was thankful. Moti had called her for the reason that she gave that day, not because Cousin Serena had noted the visit across the hedge and disapproved.

"I was introduced to one of the Russell girls, Cousin Serena, said Audrey just before she left for school one morning. "Would you mind if I went over to see her some time?"

"N-no," hesitated Cousin Serena. "If you go, perhaps they will not expect me to come. I can't call on people who happen to move into the neighborhood!"

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"No," sympathetically said Audrey. Cousin Serena did look half ill that morning.

"But I can't have those children running in here."

"Probably that could be managed. They seem to have plenty to do at home."

"Yes, and of course, unless you invite them, they are not your age and they would not be as likely to come. As you say, it might be managed. I am glad that you are getting so sensible, Audrey."

Audrey started out to the car. "Wait," said her cousin. "Whenever you do make that call, you might mention my nervous trouble and how anything out of the ordinary upsets me."

"I will, Cousin Serena," brightly said Audrey. She felt more a free agent than ever now. Perhaps that was the matter. Poor Cousin Serena probably suffered, and perhaps she might be timid with strangers. Audrey could sympathize with her there, but Cousin Serena had never given her that impression. Anyhow she could go to see the Russell family. My, there were a good many of them!

Audrey wondered if she could manage it to be there when there was no one except the girls about. Then she laughed at herself inwardly for a goose

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and decided to go over there simply and informally, whoever might be about.

It was made easy for her that very day, for when Durga stopped the car to let Audrey descend, there was Retta just going up the steps of the Russell house. She turned to look at Audrey and bow, while Audrey impulsively beckoned, then ran around the hedge to the Russell entrance. "Wouldn't it be convenient," she asked, "if I came over for a minute before dinner,—pretty soon?"

"For several minutes," replied Retta warmly. "Come right in now."

"Thank you, I would, but I think that I'd better leave my books in my room and wash up a little before I make my first appearance."

"Just as you like about that," said Retta, "but we'll be expecting you, don't fail us."

"I shall be right over unless there is something that I do not know about at home; but that is not likely."

Audrey went back and Retta went into the Russell house with the announcement that the "mysterious girl from the mysterious house was coming to call."

"She isn't mysterious any more," said Billee, who was sitting on the floor in the big living-room struggling with shoe-strings. "I was going roller skating

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with Harry and I can't wear my skates with these shoes. But I believe that I will stay now. Suppose she tells about those Indian things and I miss it."

"If she does, we'll tell you, or ask her to tell you all over again some time."

"All right, then. Don't forget. Yes,—coming, Harry!"

"I'm going to skin out, too," said Verne, who was waiting while his mother sewed up a rip in the sleeve of his coat.

"I think that it would be more polite for you to stay and meet Miss Audrey at least," said Mrs. Russell, sewing away, her little sewing basket on the broad window ledge beside her. Nancy, please pick up Billee's shoes. She has left them in the middle of the floor."

"As usual," said Nancy, going to pick them up.

"Here, Mother, if you are through mending, I'll take your basket out, too. Let's make a good impression. I just love this room!" Nancy, holding the small shoes and the work-basket, stopped to look around.

There were big windows on two sides of the front room. In them some plants which had not been set outdoors yet were blooming, among them a tall white

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lily and a pale pink hydrangea. On a table at one side of the room a large bunch of lilacs made the room fragrant. The furniture was not elegant but good, and comfortable; a new cover over the old davenport hid the sign of wear, for the Russells used their "goods and chattels" and enjoyed them. Some big chairs and some smaller ones, a table full of books and magazines, some pictures and one wall devoted to bookcases, the big, rather clumsy mantel with its mirror,—and the room was completed. Gas logs had been put in the fireplace, where a "hideous" old coal grate had been; but Mr. Russell still contended that for comfort nothing could take the place of a coal fire.

It was into this room that Audrey, dressed for dinner, both in honor of the occasion and also to be ready without dressing again, was ushered. She had debated whethed to wear a hat or not, and had spent several moments of sad indecision about wearing gloves. But Moti had happened to come in, and on inquiring where her young mistress was going and being informed, she immediately handed Audrey her best hat and her kid gloves. It was warm and delightful out, but Moti brought out a light, Oriental scarf, which was just the thing and gave the touch of

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formality or of informality, Audrey scarcely knew which, to the calling costume. Moti's instinct could be trusted on this occasion, though Moti was scarcely American yet.

"You really did come back," said Retta, who met Audrey on the porch and brought her into the house and the big room. "This is my mother,—Audrey Craig, Mother." Audrey was shaking hands with Mrs Russell and Nancy before she knew it, and there were no boys to be afraid of. She forgot herself in her interest in her hostesses. Was this she, Audrey Craig, chatting away with this sweeet, motherly woman as if she had known her for years?

At least, Audrey thought that she was chatting. Mrs. Russell and the girls were seeing a very pretty, lady-like girl, who so evidently wanted to do the right thing and was so adorably shy, yet responsive. The pink color came and went in Audrey's cheeks and she felt a little breathless with excitement, for it meant much more to her to meet these people than it did at the time to them, though they were interested.

"Cousin Serena hoped that I would tell you how hard it is for her to do things outside of her regular routine," Audrey said, when Mrs. Russell kindly inquired after her cousin. "She is very easily upset."

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"We shall be very glad to see her at any time, Miss Audrey," said Mrs. Russell, "whenever she is well enough and feels like dropping in informally."

Audrey could not imagine Cousin Serena's dropping in informally anywhere, but she did not say what she thought.

Nancy told about their being so crowded in even a large apartment; about their delight at finding this house; of the reported spooks and the happiness of Billee and Harry over the prospect, though they had been more or less disappointed so far in the non-appearance of any ghosts whatever; of Robert's going to the university, and of La Verne's having gone to a military school. "He has been of so much help that Father and Mother have not sent him back yet and he begs to finish the year in New York at the high school nearest us," Nancy said. Verne had done as he said and was out playing ball.

"Yes, Verne's already acquainted with all the boys anywhere around," said Retta, "and says that he is going to pitch on some team!"

Audrey's ignorance of boys and of baseball was about equal, but it was pleasant to hear all these things. In reply to a remark from Mrs. Russell about Billee's anxiety to hear about India, Audrey

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gave a little of her own experience. "My father was a doctor and soon after he and Mother were married they went to India to visit my father's half-brother, who is an officer in the English army. Mother had a dear classmate, too, who married a missionary. Father wanted to see conditions and diseases, too. He used to say that there are enough germs in India to kill off the whole world. Then, when he got there, it happened that at the headquarters of the missionaries they new, the medical missionary was sick and there were all sorts of poor people waiting to be treated. I could scarcely tell you about them,—it is so dreadful! Well, my father naturally took hold to help and finally the medical missionary had to go home on sick leave. That was the beginning, and my father never did come back, except one trip for medical equipment. I was a baby then. I was twelve years old when—when I came to this country, to live with my cousins and go to school here."

Audrey had been obliged to hesitate and finish differently. She could not yet speak calmly of that terrible time when she had been left without her parents. Mrs. Russell was ready to change the trend of the conversation, when Billee, quite without intention, supplied the distraction. She came clumping up

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the steps of the porch, skated across it and into the hall, into the big room as far as the hard wood extended, and clumped across the rug to sit down directly in front of Audrey and take off her skates.

"Billee!" exclaimed Retta.

"Come Billee," said Mrs. Russell, "I am sure that you do not mean to be impolite, but it is not just the thing to do, my child, to go right in front of the guest."

"To say nothing of skating right over the hall floor," added Nancy.

Billee looked up at Audrey. "Excuse me," she said, but she continued to take off her skates as before.

"Billee is hopeless!" sighed Retta to Nancy, but the child did not hear that.

"I rather like it," said Audrey, reaching over to give that slender ten-year-old shoulder a pat. Perhaps it was because Billee was small for her age that she had been a little spoiled by a letting down of the system where she was concerned. Verne claimed that his mother had worn herself out in bringing up the older ones in the way in which they should go and that satisfied with the "fine result," she rested on her oars, or possibly her "paddles," too soon.

"She *likes* it," said Billee at once, looking at Retta

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and Nancy. The skates were off by this time, but Billee still sat at Audrey's feet and looked up at her. "Did you ever ride on an elephant in India?"

"Yes, Billee."

"Did you ever see any of the big snakes?"

"Yes, but not very many. My mother and I never went into the real jungle, only on the edge. Once we were in a village, though, when there had been a man-eating tiger there."

"What did it do?"

"What they generally do. He dragged off a man, one of the natives, but we did not see any more of it, and we did not even see it happen. But Billee, there are beautiful things in India. Some day I will tell you about the temples and the wonderful Taj Mahal and the carving and jewels on it. Perhaps I can give you something that came from India if you would like it."

"Oh, I would. When could I come over to get it?"

"Billee, dear, you can not go over very soon, if at all," said Mrs. Russell, finally quite annoyed.

"I understand how Billee feels, Mrs. Russell. Suppose we make a mysterious appointment to meet by the hedge about,—let me see,—about five o'clock

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to-morrow evening." Audrey's eyes sparkled almost as much as Billee's. Billee was standing by her now, her slender arm on the back of Audrey's chair. Her attention was entirely upon Audrey, an almost rapt expression on her face. "Then I will have something, not very much, perhaps, but something that I brought from India."

"That will be wonderful," sighed Billee.

"I must go now," said Audrey. "I have stayed too long for a call,—"

"But not long enough for a good visit," said Retta. "Why it doesn't seem a minute."

"I'm afraid that I have kept you from overseeing your dinner or something, haven't I?"

"Our dinner is safely in the oven, taking care of itself," Nancy replied. But they all rose with Audrey, who shook hands with Mrs. Russell. All the girls accompanied her to the door, and just then Verne, dusty, his hair disheveled, ran up the steps. He carried a ball in his hand and looked rather disconcerted upon seeing Audrey. But he could not get out of the introduction, and for once, Audrey thought that she was the less embarrassed of the two.

Verne did not stop except for the few friendly words which showed that he knew how to say them.

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Excusing himself, he went on into the house, while the girls said goodbye to Audrey.

Pleased with her call, and a little flushed after the first social effort for some time, Audrey went to her home next door. At dinner she found Cousin George a trifle interested in his neighbors. "I saw you coming back from a call," said Cousin Serena over her dessert. Audrey had not felt that she should introduce the subject unless they were interested, but now her face lit up with an animation not reflected in the calm faces around the table. "Did you find the new family suitable for acquaintance?"

"I am quite sure that you would think so, Cousin Serena," Audrey answered, now a little on guard. "Mrs. Russell, with her pretty hair turning gray a little, and her brown eyes,—and sweet face, is just an ideal mother. I did not see them all. Nancy is the oldest girl and very much like her mother, except that she has rather light brown hair. Retta and La Verne have the brown eyes, too, but Billee and the other twin I have seen in the yard must be like the father, for they are fair. I met the three girls, and Verne as he was coming into the house. There is another son who attends the university, they told me."

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"Yes," said Mr. Avery. "I met him and his father one evening, rather, passed them on the street."

"Do they speak the English language correctly?" inquired Cousin Serena without much interest except to throw that little dart?

Audrey, used to Cousin Serena's remarks of the sort, but not enjoying them any more for that reason, dropped her eyes to her plate as she answered. "So far as I am capable of judging, Cousin Serena, they do. I thought Mrs. Russell's voice and speech quite beautiful."

It was Friday evening. Although there was no hurry about lessons, it was Audrey's custom to study part of the time in her room. Indeed, there was little else to do, except the reading that she enjoyed, or a bit of pretty needle-work. In this both Cousin Serena and Moti excelled. It was one thing that Audrey could learn now. She often recalled, now that it was so practical for her, what her mother had once said about there always being something that one could learn, even in circumstances that one did not choose.

As the evening was mild, Audrey threw up both of her windows, and leaned out for a moment to look up at the stars, the same stars that shone some-

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times above her in the dear days when her father told her what some of them were. Then she drew back, but felt too lazy to begin her lessons. She might see what she had for Billee, "might as well." From her closet she dragged a huge leather case in which she kept her curios, with other mementos of that strange country in which she had lived the greater part of her life. To see better she turned on all the central lights, for she had so far only the light from her study lamp upon her desk. She would be extravagant for a little

She pulled a table directly under the lights and began to fill it with things from the large case. Some she put back at once, though she shook out a gay native costume and ran to the mirror to drape the silken sari about her for a moment. But she folded the costume and put it back carefully in its box, replacing it in the case. Should she give Billee something to wear? No.—Billee was little, and she did not know them very well. Some little curio from the bazaars would be better, or how about one of her pretty stones?

Audrey went to her bureau drawer and took from it the six sandalwood boxes, bringing them to the table. This was a pleasant way to spend an idle hour.

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Here was the gift of the first birthday, an odd ornament for the hair, set with a few turquoises, rather a queer gift for a nine year old girl, perhaps, but Audrey knew all about the child brides of India and their different decorations, their barbaric jewelry. How funny her father had been! He was packing his doctor's case and had not looked at it; but hearing her discuss what it's purpose might be, he had said, "Sure it isn't a nose ring?" in his jolly, teasing way.

The gift for her tenth birthday was a curious anklet, impossible for her to wear, but of gold and valuable. On her eleventh birthday a delicate necklace of gold wire in the Indian workmanship arrived. This she had worn in India, especially delighting in some tiny bangles set with small jewels.

But prettiest of all, Audrey thought, was the gift of the twelfth birthday. It was one that she often enjoyed; part of it she wore. She opened the sandalwood box and took out the familiar and beautiful jar, very small, of carved oriental onyx or alabaster. It always made Audrey think of the lacy carvings in the Taj Mahal, that magic memorial which she had seen on one of her last trips with her father and mother in India. Out into her palm she

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poured the contents. "I always did want to play with jewels," she said to herself.

When her father had seen this last gift, he had seemed annoyed. "I must find out who sends these valuable gifts and have it stopped," he told Audrey's mother. But the stones were for the most part not gems of great value.

"For some of your patients," said Mrs. Craig, Audrey recalled, "these things would be nothing. Let it go for the present."

Through her fingers Audrey let the pretty things drip into the other hand. Through the open window the soft spring breeeze blew gently upon the young girl, rather an unusual sight in America, the thoughtful, rather pleased face, bent over the stones. One particularly fine bloodstone. Dr. Craig had had set into a small ring for his daughter and that Audrey wore on her little finger. There were finished sets of agate, bloodstone, amethyst, turquoise and tapis lazuli; some red crystals of India's tourmaline; a topaz, from Ceylon very likely; pieces of red carnelian, and several garnets and a few pearls, not very perfect.

But to the eyes of an eager watcher, who let his head occasionally appear above the window sill from

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the outside, the glowing display may have seemed both desirable and valuable. Had Audrey not happened to look up as she suddenly thought of another source of a gift for Billee, she might have found the thief upon her before she knew of his presence. But from beneath the blaze of light she started to rise, her hand still holding the gems, when she saw hands upon the sill raising a dark form that seemed ready to spring into the room. "Moti!" she cried, running to the door and scattering the stones as she ran.

But it was not Moti who appeared as soon as the startled Audrey drew the door part way open. The frightened cry had reached the ears of Durga over the open transom. How he ever made his way up the stairs so quickly Audrey could not understand. It seemed that she scarcely had time to open the door before he was there, pushing past her. The robber, with a muttered threat in Hindustani, had stopped short by the table when he heard Audrey cry and was gathering up the jewelry when Durga appeared.

To Audrey, who had obeyed Durga's command to get out into the hall, it seemed like a scene from India, though the native costumes were lacking. Threateningly Durga ran after the man, who leaped

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out of the window, Durga after him, active as a cat. Audrey could hear the vines crash with the descent of the two. Moti silently entered behind Audrey who ran at once to the window and looked out. Moti closed the door. "I think that your cousins did not hear this," she said.

Audrey was too much concerned about Durga to think of her cousins, but she wondered at Moti's apparent indifference. Anxiously she was leaning out into the starlight. Durga was picking himself up from the turf and a light figure was leaping the hedge into their yard.

"There he goes," said the shadowy figure, and Durga was off like the wind.

Audrey saw that the young man who had leaped over the hedge was one of their neighbors, though she was not sure that it was Verne. He leaped back again, but paused by the hedge and looked up at Audrey's window. "All right?" he asked,

"Yes. Wait, please," Audrey replied. "Moti, I am going down to speak to our neighbor. I want to ask him if he saw the thief well. I will go out the back door and if you like you may wait there for me. Nora will be out of the kitchen by this time.

While Audrey spoke she was closing and locking

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the window and now she ran ahead of the disapproving Moti, passing quietly down the stairs and into the garden by the kitchen door.

When the young man on the other side of the hedge saw her, he moved back to a place where the bushes made her approach easy. He touched his cap. "This is Miss Audrey Craig, I believe. I am Robert Russell. I'm not so sure that I'd like to tackle the man that your Hindu servant ran after just now."

"That is what I want to ask you about," said Audrey. "I was not sure whether it was you or your brother, whom I have met."

"They told me at dinner that you had called. I was outside taking a turn about the yard when I saw this thief climbing into your window. I had noticed your bright light before, but one would scarcely expect a thief to climb in where a room was so evidently occupied. I called out and ran to the hedge just in time to see the fellow come tumbling out again with your man in hot pursuit. I was not near enough to catch the thief but jumped over in time to tell your man in which direction the thief had gone."

"He will attend to that," said Audrey. "I was dreadfully frightened, but I can tell you why he climbed into my window. I was sitting right under

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the light, looking at some very pretty though not highly valuable jewels that some one in India sent me. They did shine prettily and at a little distance they must have looked like a mine of wealth, especially as the man did not know but I had more of them than those I was playing with. He probably thought that he could reach me before any one was roused, but I happened to look up and see him and I got to the door calling for my ayah. Queer that he was a Hindu, too."

"I would be careful, Miss Audrey. The man may have been watching for some time. I was glad to hear you put down the window and lock it. Did not your cousins hear the commotion?"

"As I came down I heard Cousin George reading to Cousin Serena." Audrey gave a little laugh. "Cousin Serena is probably half asleep, and they are in the front room downstairs. I think that Moti is probably in favor of not telling them anything about it, to frighten them and upset Cousin Serena's nerves for a month. Durga will watch over us, in case he comes safely back."

Audrey was starting to move away now. "Thank you Mr. Russell, for starting to the rescue."

"It was all over before I could do anything," replied

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Robert Russell. "I will wait here until you are safely inside," he added; "and I should like to see if 'Durga' returns whole."

Audrey, too, was interested in that. She and Moti went back upstairs and waited, Audrey opening her window part way, to watch. It seemed a long time, but Audrey kept her vigil. At last she saw Durga. He was limping a little, but hurrying. With a sigh of relief, Audrey rose from her seat by the window and began to prepare for bed, Moti had been picking up the scattered stones and arranging the disordered table. The hair ornament, the anklet and the necklace were gone. Moti mourned over these, but Audrey told her that they ought to be thankful to have escaped with their lives.

In the morning, Moti handed Audrey the necklace, minus one of its bangles. "Durga brought it back," she said. But Durga avoided conversation with Audrey. Cousin Serena commented upon Durga's slight limp. "It is rather annoying to have a butler with a limp," she said. "He told me that he turned his ankle in the garden last night."

"Too bad," said Audrey.

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CHAPTER V.

WHY AND WHEREFORE?

One thing Audrey felt had been settled by this episode with the thief. That was that Durga was friendly to her. Could it be possible that Durga had come to protect her in some way? From what or from whom did she need protection, then? But Audrey dismissed that thought. Durga's being employed was an accident. His explanation of why he always gave her the birthday present was sufficient. However, he might know of some one who would be likely to steal her little jewels, perhaps some one who knew about the gifts. But why would any one give her something which she must not accept? Well, Durga had some notion, and under the circumstances, she would do well to pay attention to his suggestions. Perhaps some one found out about the birthdays and their gifts.

Audrey reviewed some things relating to her past

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life in that strange country of India. One odd thing had happened just before she had left its "coral strand." She had been a stout little person to all appearances; but she had carried a big heartache when, with Moti, she went on the boat to join some travelers in whose care she was to make the trip. Her uncle had not been able to see her off himself, but her arms were full of little gifts from different friends. Moti, also laden, managed to relieve Audrey of her chief encumbrances and went to find the cabin, while Audrey joined the friends upon the upper deck.

It was just as she reached it that a tall coolie came toward her and handed her a curious basket, containing fruit or flowers, Audrey supposed. She accepted it and was about to look into it, when it was suddenly snatched from her by another coolie, who appeared from nowhere. He tossed it over the side of the vessel into the water and ran with all his might after the first coolie, who leaped over the railing and disoppeared from Audrey's view.

The second coolie followed him, but by the time the astonished Audrey and her friends reached the railing to look over, nothing could be seen of either. No one in the party was sufficiently interested to do

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anything about it, but Audrey remained where she could watch the surrounding waters. Finally, at some distance from the ship a boat was putting toward the shore. One of the coolies, as Audrey thought, was in it, which one she could not tell.

When much later Audrey went to her cabin, Moti pointed to a basket exactly like the one which had been thrown overboard. Could some one have caught it from below, or fished it out of the water? That was Audrey's first thought, though its perfect appearance precluded its having been in the water. In some surprise, she asked Moti who had given her that. "Man, coolie," Moti had replied, and added that she had opened it and found the fruit very good and right for Audrey to eat, "such as the Doctor Sahib would want." Then most of Moti's conversation was in Hindustani.

Now, was some one going to bring her something that she should not have? She had not given the other occurrence very serious thought at the time, but this reminded her of it. It certainly could not be possible that her father had an enemy! Nonsense! That burglar, with the fact that he was a Hindu, was making her fancy things! There were always burglars in cities! And she had not had any more sense

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than to look at those sparkling things under a bright light.

Audrey found one opportunity to talk to Durga, though her cousin rode with her to school that morning, taking a later train to the city. She thought that Durga managed that! But although Cousin Serena accompanied him when he brought her home from school and they took a short ride, she caught him unexpectedly in the dining room, when he was in the performance of his duties relating to dinner.

Audrey's eyes sparkled with fun. She was losing her fear of Durga. "Tell me, Durga, how you managed to get to my room so quickly last night," she said, smiling a little.

The serious Hindu did not smile. "I had been watching," he replied; "odd looking fellow hanging around once. Downstairs I noticed the vines shake and I was on the way upstairs when I heard you."

Audrey wanted to inquire further, but she simply could not ask Durga when he looked like that. Had he caught the man? Was he in the hands of the police? How had he gotten the necklace back? It was not likely that he had caught him for keeps if the necklace was all that Durga could get.

Durga was limping around the table, doing things,

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as Audrey waited in the dining room door. But Durga must have decided to satisfy her curiosity, for he added, after some little time, "He got away from me, and a car took him off. Moti will see that your windows are fixed at night."

"I have to have air, Durga, burglars or no burglars."

Durga nodded. "Window on that side will have a fastening not to go up very high."

Audrey was annoyed at the idea, but she was grateful to Durga and so she told him. But she was on her way to the garden where she was to meet Billee and hand her the promised package. It had occurred to her that to remember one twin and leave out the other would be a great mistake. She must find something for both. This she decided in one of her classes at school and mentally chose her gifts.

There had been too much excitement the night before for her to go on with her examination of her curios, but on her recent return from school she had at once selected two hideous but curious little idols, one of Brahma, with the four arms, the other of a minor deity. These she made into two little packages.

Billee was already waiting at the hedge, when

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promptly upon the hour Audrey came along the path. "I hope that you will not be disappointed, Billee, but these are funny little idols, and I thought that you and Harry might each like to have one. I haven't had much time to do anything today."

Billee took the packages and thanked Audrey very prettily, doubtless according to last instructions. "Are these the things that they worship,—'the heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone,' you know?"

"Yes," laughed Audrey. "I imagine that nobody ever really worshipped these particular ones, but maybe they have been prayed to. You would not do that, of course." For a moment Audrey rather doubted the wisdom of her choice.

"I should think *not!*" cried Billee. "But it will be fun to have them. Will you bring over some of your things some day? Mother said that perhaps you would talk to the missionary society some time and show your curios."

"O Billee! I couldn't do anything like that! I wouldn't know how."

"Probably Mother'd better wait till you are more grown up, then. But it wouldn't be like a speech,

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just telling, you know. Are you sure that you weren't a missionary?"

"How could I be, Billee? I was only twelve when I came to America. But my father and mother were just as good as the missionaries are, and my father was a Christian man. We have lots of friends among those dear missionaries, and I can get some of them to write to your mother, if she wants to know about India. And my father did a lot of work for the same reason that the missionaries do it."

Billee looked soberly at Audrey and nodded. "I 'spect your father told them about Jesus before he cut off their arms or something, when he had to do it."

"I 'spect he did, Billee," Audrey replied, but the tears were so near that she turned aside to pick a posy or two to put with the two packages. Then Harry, who had hung in the background behind the lilac bushes, came to join them as Billee turned to call him. Audrey had not seen him, but held out her hand over the hedge. The little chap in his knickers and coat, just as he had come from school, was a little shy, but looked very much pleased when he found that he had been remembered, too.

"I know what would be very cute, if your mother

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wants to do something for the missionary society. I can write to my uncle and have him send me a native costume little enough for you to wear, and then I can teach you a song in Hindustani to sing at one of the meetings. That would be better than my talking, and I'd simply be scared to death."

"Don't worry. I'll tell Mother," said Billee. "But Harry wouldn't do it, either. I shouldn't mind it at all, because I am in little plays at school."

After a little more conversation, the children went away to investigate their gifts, while Audrey, not at all sure that she had been a success with them, went back to the house. This talking over the hedge was getting to be interesting, to say the least. She would like to see Robert Russell by daylight. Billee did not make any reference to the attempted burglary, as she probably would have done if her brother had talked about it.

The night was a quiet one, just one of the ordinary evenings. Audrey looked across the way from her room; but she had heard earlier in the evening, through the open windows, the sounds of laughter from the front porch of the Russell's. Then it stopped. They were going out somewhere,

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the girls and the two boys, perhaps. It was very quiet over there now, and most of the windows were dark. Audrey sighed. It must be nice to have such good times!

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CHAPTER VI.

AUDREY ENTERTAINS.

Good times and different times were coming to Audrey, although she scarcely dared dream that she would be allowed any intimacy with the attractive family next door. They did not come at once, for one does not turn the page as quickly as that, but the new interest was immediate, at least, on both sides.

Even at school Audrey ceased to feel so shy. Naturally with the showing of more interest by Audrey, the girls were more friendly. As a day scholar, Audrey had felt very much of an outsider, but she might have become better acquainted with other day scholars, though the opportunity was limited.

Fortune favored Audrey by having the girls call on the very day that Cousin Serena went to her one exclusive club. Audrey's welcome was so sincere that they all felt at home, even in that somber

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house with its rich but ill-chosen fittings.

"We're ashamed that we could not get over before, Audrey," said Retta, sinking down comfortably in one of the cushioned chairs which Audrey offered, "but you have no idea of the things we yet have to do to that place. We hoped that you would just run over anyhow."

"I would have liked to," said Audrey, "but Cousin Serena would have thought me crazy; and besides, I might have interrupted you."

"You could not do that," said Nancy. "We would go right on with anything that had to be done."

"And then that would not be very polite, Nancy," said Retta, "but we'd like to show you over the old house, sometimes, if you are a bit interested in such things. We are just as happy over having a home again as if we had fallen heir to a million. We haven't discovered any ghosts yet, but we are hoping to."

"You must like the idea better than I would," laughed Audrey. "I had a live one, a burglar, rather, in my room the other night, and I did not like that. I prefer privacy, from ghosts or thieves."

"Robert told us about that," said Nancy, "but quietly, not to have the children hear and perhaps

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bother you with questions. We can't always keep Billee and Harry from saying the very thing we don't want them to say."

"I don't mind your knowing," said Audrey, "but as Cousin Serena and Cousin George do not know anything about it, it is just as well to have nothing said. Durga and Moti thought it would be better not to frighten them, especially Cousin Serena. Durga sees that everything is locked up."

"Robert says that he often sees your servant around in the yard very late, and sometimes very *early,* say two o'clock in the morning. Rob sits up till all hours, sometimes, himself, getting out his university work."

This was news about Durga to Audrey. "I did not know that Durga took his responsibilities as seriously as that, if he is watching."

"You ought to have a watch dog. Does Durga sleep over the garage?"

"Yes. There is a good room there. I can't imagine a dog around here, can you?"

"No, Audrey, I can't," answered Retta. "Really, we do not want one ourselves now, unless we could train it not to dig up our flowers to hide a bone.

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But we have a fine collie out at the farm. I wonder if you can't go out with us some time, after school is out. All of us spend some time there each summer, though not all at the same time. Wouldn't it be fine, Nancy, to have Audrey?" By this time all formalities were dropped and they were calling Audrey by her first name.

"It would, Retta. Why couldn't you, Audrey?"

"Oh, do you mean it, girls?" Audrey spoke quietly, but with repressed enthusiasm and clasped her hands together as she asked the question. They must really like her, then. Back in the years Audrey had been accustomed to be liked and sought, but she had been developing quite an inferiority complex of late.

"Why, of course we mean it," declared Retta.

"I believe that Cousin Serena *might* let me go. Where is the farm?"

"Up in Central New York, not far from a little lake."

"Excuse me just a minute," suddenly said Audrey, thinking that she would plan something good to eat for her callers. The girls smiled assent, while Audrey hunted up Moti, not hard to find, and ran to ask Nora if it would be all right to serve

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something. Nora's keen eyes noted Audrey's happy excitement.

"I'll make ye a cup o' tay, and mebbe ye don't like my devil's food cake?"

"Oh Nora! Honestly? With that delicious frosting?"

"The same. Keep talkin' an' Moti will bring it in immejit."

Audrey ran back to the parlor, where Nancy and Retta were chatting to each other. "I just ran out to see Nora about something," said Audrey. "We're having tea in a minute."

"How elegant," said lively Retta, while Nancy looked at her rather disapprovingly. "Did you get a lot of English customs in India, Audrey? Not that having tea isn't American, too, but they have it so much."

"I suppose that we did. Then you see my father was part English, though he was born in this country. My uncle is an English officer, you know. But Cousin Serena and Cousin George are relatives of my mother. Cousin Serena is out to her club this afternoon, and there isn't the least danger that we'll be interrupted in having the place to ourselves.

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So please stay as long as you can. If you'd like to see some of the things that I brought from India, we'll go up to my room after a little. I was looking at them when that thief climbed in and helped himself."

"Oh Audrey!" cried Retta. "Did he take much?"

"Several things, but Durga brought back one. I think that he caught the man and couldn't keep him, from what he said, but Durga does not want to talk about it and I have to use my imagination."

"He looks mysterious. Did you know that we called you the 'mysterious girl next door', when we arrived in these parts?"

"Did you? Well, there are some odd things about me, I think myself," laughed Audrey, sobering almost immediately. "Really, girls, some queer things have hapened to me. I believe that I will tell you about my mysterious birthday gifts. If I were old enough I might think that I had a mysterious admirer. Perhaps there is some unknown relative with a kind heart. Mother thought that some one was grateful to Father and perhaps that was it. He asked one possible person if he knew about it; but he did not. Durga seems to know about some danger. When I show you the curios I will tell you what I

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know, if you will not tell a soul. My friend Cam is the only one I tell about it."

"Is she some girl where you go to school?" asked Retta.

"No, she's my friend in England. She was in India, where I was, most of the time; but she goes to school in England now. I almost did, too, but Father and Mother had wanted me to come back to America to be educated, so Uncle sent me here. I don't know the girls at the school very well. You see, I'm only a day scholar and Cousin Serena,—well, I just have not gotten very well acquainted, and I felt shy, especially at first. I was different, you know, and I heard one girl making fun of the way I talked, at least, I thought she was doing it. Perhaps she wasn't."

"Your speech is beautiful, Audrey," said Nancy. "Mother noticed it and spoke of it, your lovely bit of an accent, not exactly English, but a little foreign. Robert, too, spoke of it."

"And they made fun of me, Audrey, for copying it," added Retta, with a comical raising of her brows. "I just naturally imitate, you know, without knowing that I am doing it and at the table I was talking as you had done, just a little; and Billee, who has been

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terribly impressed with you, Audrey, began to do it too. So Robert, with a very gracious and formal air, passed me the hot biscuit, flourishing the plate a bit. 'My dear Miss Audrey,' he said, 'can I not persuade you to have a bisouit?' They all laughed, of course, and I waked up!"

"I don't think, though, that I like to be different and imitated," smiled Audrey, not understanding Retta exactly.

"You should not have told her that, Retta," said Nancy. "It was only that Retta was trying it out a little. Better apologize, Retta."

"Oh, no!" quickly said Audrey. "I am not offended. Nobody could be. Perhaps the girl at school was only 'trying it out,' too. I have been a little too lonesome to understand, I imagine."

"It is a shame for you to be lonesome, with all the girls that there are," said Nancy. "Spend all the time you can with the Russell family and I'll guarantee that you will not be lonesome!"

"I should say not," Retta added. "There may be times when you will want to escape."

"I'll risk it," said Audrey, "if you really want me to come."

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"We do," said Nancy, wisely adding, "very likely it would be better for you to do the visiting, Audrey. I imagine that your cousins like their own quiet ways. You can let us know if your Cousin Serena thinks we *ought* to call. But you just run in to see us. We'll call you over anyhow."

While Audrey was telling the girls that she appreciated the plan and hoped to have them for real friends, Moti came in with a tray. Cousin Serena's best silver teapot and linen were displayed; but Moti had brought quaint plates and cups that were Audrey's own. Over these the girls exclaimed, while they enjoyed more than one cup of tea and declared that they must have Nora's recipe for the devil's food cake that melted in their mouths. "Sneak it to us, Audrey," laughed Retta, mildly rebuked again by Nancy.

But Retta did not mind. "I say the things that Nancy would like to say and thinks that she ought not," Retta gravely explained. "She thinks that as the oldest girl she must be an example. See?"

Smiling, Audrey said that she did, but she rather approved more of Nancy after all. It was great fun to have tea together. Then Audrey took the girls to her room upstairs, very different from the room

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below. The Victorian furniture was good, if heavy in appearance, and in other matters Audrey had had her way about putting up such pictures as she wanted and using her own pretty things, for her uncle had seen to have such treasures as the Craigs possessed boxed and sent to accompany Audrey to America. There was not so much, but the curios and pretty things picked up in the orient, chiefly by Mrs. Craig, were very artistic and Audrey loved them. They were not all of India, for on a small table a dainty tea set from China stood. Audrey explained that sometimes Moti served her breakfast in her room, and that the next time they came tea would probably be made there.

Pictures of Dr. and Mrs. Craig were framed together and stood on Audrey's bureau. More little ornaments were arranged on top of the chiffonier; but Audrey, in a moment, was showing the girls the curios and beautiful things which she kept in her big case.

Having once given her confidence, she told them about the birthdays, and as a climax to the entertainment, she brought out the six sandalwood boxes, explaining what had been in each. The girls were deeply interested, sitting around Audrey's table and

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pouring the pretty jewels into their hands, as she had done many, many times before.

"Aren't these very valuable?" asked Retta, surprised at the beauty of the gems.

"Mother said not so very," replied Audrey. "I never showed them to a jeweler, of course. All together, they made a handsome gift, I suppose. I love the bloodstone in this ring, though for a birthstone I should have an emerald. I was born in May."

"Then you will have another present pretty soon, —or is your birthday past? This is the third, isn't it?"

"I believe so. No, my birthday is on the tenth. It is real thrilling to think about every year, and to wonder what may be sent, or even if anything at all will come."

"Haven't you the least idea, Audrey, about who sends them?"

"Father's patients were high and low. These might even be stolen, but I hope not. I have a feeling that they are from some native person, though it is quite possible that some European might be do-

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ing it. In that case, I'll probably be told some day. If a Hindu or Mohammedan sends them, one can't tell."

"The fact that they come through your servant seems to indicate a Hindu source," said Nancy, thoughtfully.

"Durga is Hindu by birth, I'm sure. What he is now, who knows? His caste may have been taken away. He may have come to America to get away from some persecution. You can't tell a thing about him. As he suggested to me, it may be only because he is here and they think that he will keep the secret if they send the presents through him."

"You are more mysterious than ever, Audrey," said Retta, examing a pretty amethyst. "You ought to have this set in a ring or pin, Audrey. But I love these turquoises, too, especially the ones with the inlaid stuff in them, if that is it."

"That is just a metal mixed in. They call it turquoise matrix, and I think that the ones without the metal are considered more valuable. But I like them that way, too."

"Think of having a handful of jewels to play with! No wonder that thief thought that it was his

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chance. Would you dare bring these over some time to show to Mother?"

"Indeed I will!"

"And you say that the wealthy natives wear such gems on their clothes?"

"Yes. You ought to see some of those wives in the zenanas. A zenana is the women's apartment or department. I saw one girl, about my age, I think, that had on an anklet such as one could scarcely imagine would be even comfortable to wear. It went around the ankle, of course, and then there were ornaments, linked together a little over the foot and having bangles and jewels clear down to the toes. She had on a necklace, too, that was almost like a low collar, heavy with gold and jewels.

"I heard Cousin George saying how much gold money America has But I guess it must be like India's jewels,—not much of it gets in circulation! And that is the idea in India among the native princes, Father said, to hold such riches as we would have money in a bank."

Nancy looked at her watch at this point in the conversation. "We *must* go, Retta. We've been here two hours as it is."

"It doesn't seem two minutes," sighed Audrey,

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with some exaggeration in her reluctance to have the girls go.

"Mother will need some help about dinner, and your cousins will be gathering in, too. We've had a lovely time, Audrey. We surely did not expect to be entertained like this! Now Mother wants to know when you can take dinner with us. I wonder if it wouldn't be fine to celebrate your birthday that way? Do you suppose that your cousin will let you come to dinner and then do something rash in the evening? We'll take care of you all right."

"I'll try to come whenever I'm invited," said Audrey with happy eyes. "I think that Cousin Serena may let me. I don't see why she should not."

"All right. We'll see what Mother says and let you know. We shall be perishing with curiosity," continued Retta, "to know what your unknown benefactor sends this time. The children, by the way, are enjoying those funny little idols. They took them to school the other day, and several of their friends have called here to see them since then. Billee, especially, feels very important. When you were back in the garden last evening you were pointed out as the 'lovely girl from India, who was

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going to send for a native costume' for Billee to wear!"

After the girls left, accompanied part way by a bare-headed and smiling Audrey, she felt that she had almost too many happy things to think about. She wished that she need not mention the visit to Cousin Serena. She hoped that it was not wrong to say nothing about serving tea. That in some homes would have been a matter of course, at the hour. Audrey felt no criticism that it was not the custom here, but she did hope to escape the surprise and criticism which Cousin Serena might offer.

It was not particularly good for Audrey, this repression which might lead so naturally to a bad habit of concealment. But fortunately Audrey's life was so full of studies and so protected from other things that there was little to conceal beside her feelings. These she probably would begin to express more fully to her uncle as the time for his furlough and her temporary release drew near. It took a good while to think things out anyway.

What a delightul prospect for a happy birthday! That took precedence of other thoughts and almost put Durga's warning out of mind altogether.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE

A FEW days after Audrey's little tea party, for which she had not been called to account, she was walking home from the street car after school when she happened to think of a book that she must get, or wanted to get, in connection with some of her school work. Audrey had her own little allowance, which she was at liberty to spend. At first Cousin Serena had been inclined to decide upon expenditures, but it was due to Cousin George that for a year or more no comments were made or questions asked about her pin money. Audrey shrewdly surmised that her uncle might have written something about it, though she had not complained to him about anything. It was not "sporting," she and Cam thought.

Audrey turned back and went into a little shop which kept books and some other things. She did not find what she wanted, but bought two or three

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tablets, some pencils and some writing paper, slipping each package, as she thought, into her school bag or brief case, with one or two of her books which she was bringing from school. A new magazine tempted her, too, and as the shop kept a supply of home-made fudge, she indulged in that, also. She felt a little more reckless of expenditure since with the beginning of the month she had received her allowance.

There were several people in the shop, among them a girl who was in her classes at school. "Hello, Audrey," said she, as Audrey stopped before the candy, where she, too, was making a purchase, "Do you like this fudge as well as I do? Yes, give me half a pound of it, please. Say, Audrey, haven't you time to stop over at the drug store with me? I'm perishing for a sundae and they have good ones, there,—my treat."

"Why, thank you, I believe I will, only I'll not let you treat me. Why couldn't you be my guest?"

"We'll see about that. We can fight that out on the way, unless we decide to have it 'Dutch'."

"What is that?" inquired ignorant Audrey.

"Why don't you know?—when everybody pays for herself. But I have wished that I knew you

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Your chauffeur usually brings you home, doesn't he?"

"Yes. But I have wished that I knew the girls better. I'm so awfully afraid that they won't want me, I suppose."

"Why, the idea! You are considered one of the finest girls in school and the girls think that you belong to some old family that doesn't want you to have much to do with any one."

"Really?—Why, the girls at our school are like that themselves, aren't they?"

"They are from good families, yes, and some of them are a bit snob—I mean, they think a good deal of—well—" The girl stopped to pay for her fudge and stood waiting for Audrey to get hers. Then they started out.

Audrey, remembering the last remarks, looked into the bright brown eyes of this well-dressed, younger girl and laughed. "So I'm a snob and think a good deal of myself!"

"Oh, I didn't mean to say quite that!"

"It's a relief," Audrey declared. "Then the girls don't know how scared, no, how just shy I've been with them all, except in class. You see, I lived in India until I was about twelve years old; and every-

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thing was so different here, and the girls were different to me, so I thought I must seem so to them."

"You are, a little, but it is a nice kind of being different. Mary Louise Peck said that you were from Boston."

Again Audrey laughed. But they were outside now and there was an interruption. A gentleman spoke. "Pardon me, Miss, but you left one of your packages."

Audrey whirled around to find a package being handed her. It was just like one which had been done up for her, and she took it, thanking the gentleman, and tucking it under her arm as the girls walked away again, still talking about the school.

Then Audrey asked her friend, Norma Lodge, to hold the package a moment till she unfastened the straps of her leather case. Norma took the package, and neither girl saw the frown with which the man who had followed Audrey with the package watched the performance through the shop window, as he stood idly turning over the magazines.

"Why, Norma, here is my package all right," said Audrey. "The man must have made a mistake and picked up one belonging to some one else. I'll have to take it back. Just wait a moment for me, please."

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Audrey ran back, but met the man outside. "I made a mistake, didn't I?" he asked. "Excuse me. I will take it." Audrey handed it to him, and as she did she happened to think of something. She gave him a searching glance. His hat was pulled down low, but she would know him again. All at once she was afraid.

"Thank you," she said; "I would not want to run off with what belongs to some one else."

Walking rapidly, she caught up with Norma, who had been strolling slowly on. Then, just before she joined her, she looked back. The man had not gone into the store at all. "Just a moment Norma," said Audrey, stopping as if to fix the straps of her case again. "Please look, Norma," she said. "That man did not go into the store at all. Can you see what he is doing?"

"Just walking. No, somebody has joined him. They are going to an old car across the street."

"Let's get into the drug store,—quick."

'Hum," said Norma. "I wonder what's the game. If they come into the drug store we'll call the police."

"Sure enough,—we could, couldn't we?"

"Yes, childie. But I can't imagine why the man

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should want you to take a package, unless they meant to stop us somewhere and tell us that we had their package by mistake and maybe carry us off. I should hope that we'd know enough never to get into a strange car!"

"Oh, I scarcely think that. Perhaps the man wanted whatever was in that package, not that I really think so. Well, I'm glad that I found out it was not mine anyhow. Please let me buy the sundaes, Norma. I'll feel so much like the other girls. Cousin George took me into a lovely place once, down town, where I had a sundae that simply melted in my mouth."

"Do you mean to say, Audrey Craig, that you don't *ever* do this with anybody?"

"No, I don't."

"The modern miracle!" laughed Norma. "I suppose that it is much better for you, but it is so much more fun than to have ice-cream at home. All right, you may treat me and have a regular fling! But I warn you that I like the expensive ones, with nuts and everything."

"I am sure that I shall, too. They don't cost over a dollar, do they? I have about two dollars and a half in my purse."

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"Gracious no, Audrey! About thirty-five cents is my usual limit and I can get along with less."

"Not less than thirty-five cents it is, then," said Audrey, so assured by companionship that she walked into the drug store as if it were her daily custom to buy sundaes. She was relieved, however, to see a menu card on the little table to which Norma went. She could order from that without embarrassment.

"I'm going to see to it," said Norma, "that you get acquainted with some of the other day pupils; and there is one crowd at the dorm that you will like. It is time that we had you in some of our outside affairs."

"I'm not sure that I can be, but I can try to arrange it, and I do want to see more of you, Norma. Now that I know how you feel about it, I'll not be quite so—different. I haven't felt that I belonged with any of the girls."

"Well, you do."

There was no sign of the man or the car when they left the drug store. Audrey went on home, but she had no opportunity to mention the package to Durga until he drove her to school the next morning. Was that package about which he had

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warned her? But she received no satisfaction from Durga, who drove on with expressionless face when she told him about it.

"Why didn't he insist on my keeping it, if he wanted me to have it?" Audrey asked.

"Who can tell?" countered Durga.

"Perhaps it was my regular package!" Had she missed her surprise? But Durga spoke now.

"I will arrange to come for you every day now," he said. "If I am delayed, wait at the school for me."

Durga was certainly giving her orders! But he must be worried about the man. "All right, Durga, I will wait, for a while, anyhow, until after my birthday. But I am invited to the Russell's for my birthday dinner. Did you know that?"

"Yes. But it would be better to stay at home."

"I certainly shall not, Durga. I am very tired of never doing what other girls can do. I have Cousin Serena's permission to go. I like my birthday presents very much, but if they bring any danger with them, I think that they'd better stop. Could you send word to the person who sends them not to do it any more?"

"No."

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"Well, it would make me feel lonesome not to look for them, so I'll not worry about anything else. You will have to look after the thieves, then, the way you did."

"Yes," said Durga. Then he smiled, something unusual for the serious Durga. "The jewel thief is in the hospital," he added.

"Oh; have you told the police?"

"No. Better lose the other things."

"But he ought to be in jail."

Durga said nothing to this, but his mouth was grim. "Some one else try it next time."

"There must be a 'gang of thieves,' then. Isn't that what you call it?"

"No."

Audrey was puzzled. "Shall I be on guard everywhere I am?" she asked.

"Not any more than any other girl. Fear is not good."

"I see," said Audrey. But she really did not see. What was at the bottom of all this she could not imagine. Durga obviously believed that he could handle the situation. Well, let him.

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CHAPTER VIII.

AUDREY'S SIXTEENTH BIRTHDAY

AUDREY CRAIG had been considering herself sixteen for some time. Had not her sixteenth year been almost completed? But on the May morning that actually completed it she woke with a happy feeling that this was indeed a day of celebration.

It would not be celebrated at home. Cousin Serena and Cousin George never remembered birthdays. Occasionally Cousin Serena would ask, "Let me see,—how old are you now, Audrey?" and Audrey would inform her of the facts

It was especially lucky that the birthday fell upon Saturday this time. Nobody would be in school. Audrey rose, threw on her silk robe and ran to the window to look out. Oh, it was going to be a glorious day!

The birthday present from the one whom Retta called her "mysterious benefactor" had not yet

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arrived. Audrey looked around to see if Moti had slipped in with some packages before she was awake, but there was nothing.

The six sandalwood boxes were back in their proper drawer, two of them empty. Audrey had been interrupted when she had reached the gift of the twelfth birthday. Strangely enough, there had been no gift for the thirteenth birthday, the unlucky thirteenth, she had thought. Durga had seemed disturbed, but no one had said anything, and Audrey did not mention it to Moti. She did not want them to think that she counted on the gift. Perhaps something had happened. Perhaps the gifts were to be stopped. Perhaps the gift had been stolen on the way. Perhaps the giver was dead.

But on her fourteenth birthday one of the curious native bracelets came, and for her fifteenth birthday the sandalwood box held an exquisite glass container of attar of roses. Audrey knew what this was, for her mother had had it. She took it out, for after her bath she would put a wee drop of it on her clothing. It was her favorite scent and carried her back to Indian days more than anything else could do.

Audrey's uncle had sent her a draft and wrote her to get something that she needed or liked with the

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money. "I was too busy, Audrey, child, to look up a gift, and the lady on whom I usually depend for ideas is away with some of the other *'mem-sahibs'*." So Col. Craig wrote, sending her his love and his wish for many happy returns. As the draft was for twenty-five dollars, Audrey thought that she would have a new dress later on. Cousin Serena did not seem to think that Audrey needed much. Audrey had little idea what a dress would cost, but her allowance could be saved, too.

Happily Audrey splashed in her tub and dressed in clean garments for the day, planning how to spend her money, anticipating her good times. She was ready long before the chimes downstairs announced the morning meal, which she welcomed with a good appetite. Inquiringly she looked at Durga, who did not once meet her eyes. If the package from the unknown had come, he gave no sign of it.

After breakfast, at which no mention was made of her birthday, Cousin Serena called to Audrey, who was starting out the side door toward the garden. "Just a moment, Audrey. It is rather vulgar to use perfumes," she said.

"Oh, I'm sorry that there was enough for you to

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notice it, Cousin Serena. I'm rather fond of attar of roses."

"You think that anything from India is wonderful, I suppose," Miss Avery commented, with an air of weariness. "Too bad that you had to come to your mother's country."

There was nothing for Audrey to say without being impertinent. She stood silently until her cousin went by her in the hall. Then, with tears in her eyes, she started out into the garden. But Nora, who had come into the dining-room for something, had heard.

"It's a pity that she couldn't say somethin' dacent for once on the birthday!" Nora sputtered. "I niver saw a place where they didn't take the trouble to give a purrty gurrl some good times, till I got here!"

Durga, carrying out the silver coffee pot, stopped a moment to hear what Nora said, and then silently entered the pantry.

The May sunshine and the rapidly growing flowers consoled Audrey, who had not been deeply hurt. Indeed, she sometimes wondered that one for whose opinion she really cared so little could occasionally hurt her so. But poor Cousin Serena, with

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her limited circle of thought, could not dim the brightness of this day.

It was all right that she did not like the perfume. That she should suggest in regard to it was proper, too. Yet why must she always sneer at India or throw out that insinuation. Audrey did love India and her memories, but she had been brought up to feel that America was her country. Even if her father and mother had lived, by now she would very likely have been here, perhaps in some boarding school.

Audrey longed to pick a few blossoms for her very own, but she did not dare, and after all, she could not blame Cousin Serena for wanting her pretty flowers to stay put in the garden. But those beautiful pansies would have been better for the picking. Audrey looked lovingly at their faces, and some one looking over the hedge thought that Audrey herself was like some spring flower. One black velvet pansy Audrey did pick. She would press that to remember her sixteenth birthday.

Then she looked up with the feeling that some one was looking at her. Robert Russell came to the hedge near her and held up something in his hand. Verne would have thought it silly, or would have

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felt shy about giving flowers to a girl, but his elder brother was not afraid of any sixteen year old miss, and this one was quite attractive.

Smilingly Robert held out the fragrant, dewy, bouquet of pansies and lilies of the valley. "Many happy returns, Miss Audrey," he said. "I just picked these for you, a small greeting from the Russell family. I hope that you like pansies. I fancy, from the way that you looked at yours, that you do."

"Thank you, Mr. Russell," said Audrey, carefully taking the short-stemmed posies from Robert's hand. They were not tied, of course. "I picked one to press in memory of my sixteenth birthday, but you will think that I am very silly and sentimental."

"Verne is at the age when he thinks sentiment silly, but not I," returned Robert. "That is a wonderful black pansy. I doubt if we have one to match it. May I see it?"

"These are beautiful," said Audrey, fingering gently the different blossoms. "I think that I will press one of these instead. A gift is better than what you pick yourself, you know."

Robert had taken the pansy and now he put it in his buttonhole; but he was about to return it, when Audrey stopped him. "Just keep it," she said,

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"especially if you like the black pansies. There are others on this plant."

"Thanks. I will, then. We are looking for you at dinner, remember."

"I couldn't forget it if I tried," smiled Audrey, drawing back from the hedge as she saw that Robert was ready to go, "and I appreciate my birthday flowers from the Russell family very much."

By way of the side door again Audrey went to her room and arranged her flowers in a low oriental bowl of green and gold. So many little friends were the pansies, of yellow, purple, blue and mixed colors. Audrey hoped that Cousin Serena had no objection to the fragrance of lilies of the valley! But she chose a deep purple and pale blue pansy to press, with one of the graceful lily stems and its blossoms.

Still no sandalwood box! But Audrey hummed a little as she finished arranging her flowers. She opened her diary, which lay upon her desk. She should write some verses to those pansies! Sometimes Audrey scribbled rhymes and liked to do it. But she ought to write to her uncle first. It would be so long before the word reached him in any event. She must make the next steamer.

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Lunchtime came and went. No sandalwood box. Audrey had put in her time pretty well so far, with a lesson in French learned ahead for Monday and two hard problems worked out. But it was a long time to wait till dinner. She ran out to mail her letter to her uncle after lunch. On her return, she saw Durga standing in the garage door talking to some one who whisked inside upon her appearance at the side of the house. Audrey did not look that way after the first glance, nor did she appear to be in the least interested. Soberly she entered the side door, which was the one often kept unlocked when Durga was about. Audrey possessed keys to that and the front door.

But she ran upstairs jubilant. She had caught a glimpse. That was some one bringing her sandalwood box. Nevertheless, Audrey made herself go into the library, which was on the second floor, and read a bit of classic English due to be read next week. Truly Audrey was putting in a studious birthday. But happy expectations made all the difference in the world.

She had just gone back into a room made fragrant by the lilies when she heard Durga coming up the stairs. A rap at the open door, Durga's

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serious face and graceful salaams. "Salaam, Sahiba. Your box brings you the sunshine of India and her sparkling sea water. So speaks the message as it was repeated to me."

"Durga," said Audrey, as she received the box and returned his Indian greeting in kind, for "salaam" was no strange word to her,—"Durga, do you open these boxes before I do?"

"Yes, by my orders I open them, lest they are exchanged on the way. Are you afraid that Durga will keep something back?"

"No, Durga; but I see that they are only tied when they come. Still, they would be opened by the customs officers, I suppose."

"I have seen what is within. It is very beautiful. I will have to say to you that I should not wear it openly about the city except with a glove."

Soberly the Hindu and the young girl exchanged glances, and Audrey nodded in understanding. Durga left and Audrey closed her door. If she must not wear it without a glove, it was a ring,—the "sunshine of India and her sparkling sea water." The sender must have a poetic soul, but that was quite possible in strange, beautiful India. Steadily Audrey's hands moved, taking off the wrapper and

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opening the seventh sandalwood box. Oh, how pretty! Within this small sandalwood box there was another, inlaid with curious art. The cover of this she removed also.

A packing of silk was about some small object. Carefully she drew it out. Here was the drop of sea water, not blue, but green, a sparkling emerald, set to show to the greatest advantage upon some of "India's sunshine," wrought gold in a gracefully designed circlet.

Admiringly Audrey pushed it upon the fourth finger of her right hand. It was too large, but she could wear it here with a guard. That she had, a little plain gold ring of her mother's, if she could find it. Oh, she just must wear this to her birthday dinner at the Russells!

Humming the "Song of India," which the poetic message had brought to her mind, and which she had heard among the Americans and English in India, Audrey rummaged among her boxes to find the guard. There. Now it would stay on.

"Unnumbered diamonds lie within the caverns,
Unnumbered pearls within the tropic waters
Of distant India, wondrous fair!"

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In a low, clear voice, Audrey sang to herself as she began to prepare for the dinner. It would soon be time to go. What a beautiful birthday! Audrey wound her hair in three low coils now, while she still sang of "distant India, wondrous fair!"

Over the open transom, the distinct words carried to Durga, who stepped into the hall from the dining-room to catch the haunting melody. Silent, sad, he listened a moment,—his distant India, "wondrous fair!"

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CHAPTER IX.

THE BIRTHDAY DINNER.

"MOTHER, I believe that this having Audrey Craig in to dinner tonight is a big event to her." Thus spoke Robert Russell, as he entered the kitchen after giving Audrey the flowers, which he had picked for her at his mother's suggestion. Robert could always carry out such a matter gracefully, his mother thought. "It is almost pathetic," he added. "She is such a charming little thing, too. I hope that you are going to do something special."

"Trust Mother for that, Rob," said his sister Retta, without giving her mother a chance to reply. "Audrey is going to have the surprise of her life, isn't she, Mother?"

Mrs. Russell smiled. "I should scarcely say that, Retta, but I hope that she will be pleased. I felt like making something over her, Robert. I believe that she is a lonely little girl, not so little, either, and she

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is older than her years in some ways, much older than our Retta here." Mrs. Russell gave Retta a glance from smiling eyes.

Retta pouted. "She is only a few months older than I am and she can't do as much as I can."

"True, Retta," her mother replied, "but her experience has made her very thoughtul and awake to some of the real problems. I do not think, as Nancy and Retta are inclined to think, that Audrey's life over there has been so much to be deplored. It has been a safe environment for her, much better that if she had been thrown where she would have been introduced to the carelessness and reckless freedom that some of our American girls have. At least, that is my first impression, from the little I have seen and what the girls tell me. But at that she probably finds little that is congenial in her cousins, and I fully agree with Nancy and Retta that it will do her good if we add her to our family sometimes."

"Mother thinks that she will do us good, too, Rob. You will not do anything shocking, but Verne and I probably will."

"Nonsense, Retta," said Robert. "Shall I have to look out not to use any college slang, Mother?"

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"No, Rob; I wish that you were a little more care-free, like the other boys, though I don't know that it is necessary to take on their vocabulary."

"A university like Columbia, is different, Mother. It is so big, and we choose our crowd. I haven't time to get into some of the fun with the class of fellows that have it. Father needs me, too, when I have any spare time. Oh, I take out a girl occasionally, you know, when I have the cash,—class affairs and that sort of thing."

Mrs. Russell looked at her eldest with admiring affection. She regretted that he had had to be introduced to some of their family problems, but Robert was strong, physically, in a wiry way, and it had not hurt him to help make his way. Usually Robert worked on Saturday, but today he was getting ready for a special examination and was to study at home, taking his books up to the third floor to be alone. Verne was warned to keep out, but the family life went on as usual, the student hearing little of it.

Time flew more rapidly for the busy Russells than for waiting Audrey that day. Verne, with lawn mower, hoe and large scissors, devoted himself for some time to the lawn. Nancy officiated with

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broom and mop after Verne had turned the hose upon the porches. Every one was engaged in some way. Even the twins weeded the tiny plot which was the vegetable garden and helped about dishes and errands. It was no easy task to keep the twins busy and out of mischief; but there was a little park not far away where they were allowed to go. There, with the swings and other means of amusement provided, they could pass many happy hours. Billee jumped rope or played ball with Harry.

Fresh from the bath and dressed for dinner in a clean frock, Billee looked like a cherub. She was told to keep watch for Audrey and swung in the porch hammock while waiting. Verne groaned at the idea of dressing up a little more than usual for dinner, when Retta told him what the menu would afford, he professed to be consoled. "I hope that she appreciates it," he said. "They have a lot of servants, and Audrey will not have an idea how much work the baking and cooking takes."

"First I knew that you did, Verne," laughed Retta. "I'm sure that Audrey appreciates being asked to dinner all right. You should have seen her pretty face light up when we asked her."

"She's a nice girl," Verne conceded. "Did you

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say that I was to bang on Bob's door and tell him last call for dinner?"

"Yes. Call him down to the room as soon as your own toilet is far enough advanced and tell him to dress 'immejit.'"

At about a quarter of six, Audrey came dressed in her best frock of last summer, a pretty, light silk, of orchid shade, with short sleeves. She had tried the effect of various beads and her favorite necklace, which she had fixed by taking off the bangle which matched the one torn off in the struggle between Durga and the thief. None of them suited her. Severe simplicity was better and the girlish neck was unadorned. Her jewelry consisted of her wrist watch upon her left wrist and the beautiful new ring upon her right hand. The guard scarcely showed.

Though the girls had spoken of going somewhere after dinner, when they first invited Audrey, nothing had been said about it since. In consequence, she wore only her silk scarf, also from India, around her shoulders, and did not bother with hat or gloves.

"Oh, here she is!" shrilled Billee, running from the porch to meet her half way and lead her onto the open hedge gateway and up the steps to the broad porch. There Nancy met her, and Retta and Mrs.

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Russell came to wish her many happy returns and tell her how glad they were to have her come. Verne, too, handsome in a new spring suit, was as cordial as the rest. "Rob is primping upstairs," said he, "but he will be down shortly."

"Rob has been studying for an exam today," Retta explained, "and we just called him to get ready a little while ago."

The girls and Mrs. Russell looked as fresh and sweet in light gowns as if they had not just put in one of their busiest Saturdays. But the dinner had been largely made ready early in the day, with a morning of "baking and brewing," as Retta called it. She was left with Verne to entertain Audrey, while Mrs. Russell and Nancy went back to the kitchen to do the last things.

Mr. Russell, father of this delightful family, was brought in by Billee, who had run upstairs to see if he were ready. Audrey liked his kindly look and comfortable air. Harry, after having been introduced, sat in a straight chair and scarcely took his eyes from Audrey's face. But Audrey did not mind that. There was one great relief here. The burden of conversation did not rest on Audrey. They all had so much to think about and to say that the

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trouble was to get it all in, it seemed, without interrupting each other.

Robert Russell, slight, of medium height, like his mother in some ways, entered from the hall last of all. He thought that Verne was going to make some facetious remark and forestalled it by a compelling look out of his dark eyes as he entered. Audrey caught it, as she turned, and wondered what that warning glance at Verne meant. Verne grinned at his older brother, but he was already holding out his hand to Audrey.

"Welcome to the Russell stronghold, Miss Audrey. I wished you many happy returns this morning, I believe."

"You gave me the greetings of the family in a very acceptable way," smiled Audrey, and Retta wished that she could be as grown up and think of the right thing to say as well as Audrey could. But in spite of Audrey's real timidity, she had been associated with older people so much that to use their methods of speech, or the language of the books which she read, was most natural.

Mr. Russell leaned back in his own big chair, always reserved for "Father," or "Dad," as Verne called him. He picked up a magazine from the table

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and left the entertaining of Audrey to the younger members of the family. Harry's one contribution to the conversation was similar to one of Billee's questions. "Did you like riding on an elephant?" he asked soberly.

"Why, not particularly, Harry," Audrey answered. "Did you ever ride on a horse that was a pacer?"

"Yes; on the farm."

"Well, it's like that you know, only on those big elephants you get rocked from side to side as their feet go down that way, first on one side, then on the other, and if they go fast and up and down hill,—I suppose you would say 'O boy!' as one American boy said when I was on an elephant with him. It's like taking a ride in a sight-seeing 'bus, I imagine."

"Haven't you ever ridden in one of our 'buses?" queried the amazed Verne.

"No, I've never had a chance."

"Well, the Russells will have to take you out of the convent life, then. May I have the pleasure of your society on a 'bus up Riverside Drive and a few other places?"

"Yes, indeed, if I can manage it. Cousin Serena and Cousin George have gone with me in the car,

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you know, so I've seen the city, but it must be fun to do the 'buses."

"We'll do lots of things," said Retta, "if you can get permission to go around with us. We'll not let you come to grief and we must put in the time before we go to the farm. In the language of the poet, spring has *came*!"

Before Retta had further opportunity to startle the grammarians with her verbs, dinner was announced. "In honor of the occasion," said Mrs. Russell, "we shall observe a slight formality. Father, you may take out Miss Audrey, Robert will escort me; Verne, the girls; and I shall expect Harry to look after Billee."

"Oh, I want to sit by Audrey!" said Billee, as Mrs. Russell directed her youngest offspring to look for their place cards not far from their father, but opposite Audrey, who sat between Mr. Russell and Verne. That young man was quite overwhelmed. Would he have to entertain her? But seeing Robert's interested eye in Audrey's direction, he decided that he could quite as well "make a hit" with Audrey as old Bob. In consequence, he fairly outdid himself in politeness and attention.

Audrey felt very much more at home beside the

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jolly Verne than with Robert, but she admired the young college student greatly and listened, impressed, whenever he spoke. Verne soon saw that there was nothing "silly" about Audrey. She was as direct with him as with his sisters, to his relief. Sure, he would take her all around, and Nance and Retta, too. He had had his way about finishing the year in high school.

The whole experience was a treat to Audrey. She watched the ease with which Mr. Russell carved the roast and wondered at his speed in serving his large family. Nancy and Retta had slipped out of their places to remove the pretty glass dishes which had held the fruit mixture and to bring in and remove the dishes of the soup course, again bringing in the big platter of meat and the vegetables. But the salad was already on the table, with the bread and all the little side dishes, like jelly and olives. Without servants, they planned to have as little change and rising from the table as possible.

It was true that Audrey had been used to servants all her life. But she could not help noticing how capably every one did his share. At a sign from their mother, Harry and Billee solemnly rose to remove the dinner plates. No comment had been

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made upon the new ring, but Billee patted the hand that wore it, as she took Audrey's plate.

Robert had wondered if it were possible for a girl so young to be engaged. Then he noted that the ring was worn on the right hand. Verne saw the ring, too, and not knowing on which hand the engagement ring was worn, thought that she might have been promised in the cradle, so to speak, to some Englishman or other out in India, for what they knew about Audrey was discussed in the family. Nancy and Retta knew that Audrey must have received her birthday gift from India, but that they did not tell.

They were fine people. Audrey instinctively knew it. How good they were to make so much of her!

Then, while she was thinking that dessert would be almost too much after all the rest, in came Nancy, flushed and smiling, carrying a big cake, with sixteen candles. "Oh!" exclaimed Audrey, as Nancy set it down in front of her and handed her a lighted match.

Audrey was speechless, but Billee squealed in delight, such a funny little squeal that a ripple of laughter ran around the table and rather relieved the surprised Audrey. With trembling fingers, she lit

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the candles, one by one, looking up into Nancy's smiling face when she had finished. "We'll let the candles burn a few moments while we bring in the ice-cream, Audrey. Then you must cut it."

Nancy disappeared again into the kitchen, from which Harry and Billee soon came, carefully carrying, with slow steps, the plates of ice-cream. Audrey dreaded cutting the cake, yet she would not have missed doing it for the world, nor would she disappoint these kind friends.

With a question to Nancy in regard to where and how it should be cut, Audrey managed to acquit herself creditably in the undertaking, conscious of Robert's eyes upon her new ring.

Nancy had baked the cake, it seemed, as Verne asked which one should be praised for the "grand result." Soft, white and flaky, it really melted in one's mouth, as Mr. Russell declared. The white frosting was a success, too, and Audrey, adding her praise, saw how happily and sweetly Nancy took the apreciation of her family. Audrey did not like to think of going home.

As the next day was Sunday, dishes could not be left. Hearing Billee groan about wiping them, "because Audrey is here, and *we'll* have to go to bed,

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of course, right away," Audrey suggested that she help wipe the dishes herself.

"All right," said Retta. "I'll begin to wash the glasses and silver while Nancy gets the rest ready. You may put away the food, Mom, and then you may go in the front room with the head of the family."

"'*Head* of the family,' did I hear some one say?" asked Mr. Russell, pushing his chair back into its place.

"All right, Father, you may escort the head into the front room right now," said Robert. "I'll put the stuff away. Nance can tell me where it goes, can't she?"

Retta went on assigning the tasks. Verne, Audrey, and perhaps Robert, after he had attended to refrigerator and pantry, were to wipe dishes, while Harry and Billee were to put them away,— "very carefully, now, kiddies."

This was an entirely new experience to Audrey. It was great fun to hear the Russells joking with each other. Robert and Verne were enveloped in large aprons and one was hunted up for Audrey. Verne, watching Retta, declared that at last he saw a use for the girls' short sleeves in their summer

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dresses. "It's so they can wash dishes without changing their frocks."

Fortunately the kitchen was large. In none of the modern kitchenettes could the Russell family have carried out this division of labor. Harry and Billee vied with each other to receive the glasses and dishes which Audrey wiped. There was sad danger of a smash at times in their rivalry, but Verne averted a real calamity and warned the children against troubling Audrey. "She can't wipe them all, young man," he said to Harry. "Here; take these highly polished articles from your brother, and be glad that you have such an expert in the family!"

Robert, his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, found a dish pan, and as the sink was fully occupied by Retta's operations, he put it on the kitchen table and began to wash up the "pots and pans," scrubbing and scraping with the "chore-boy." He called Audrey over to show her his method; and as Nancy was ready to wipe dishes now, Audrey gave up her towel and carried pots and pans to Retta for a final washing and rinsing under the hot water at the sink.

"Course in home economics," said Robert. "If you were I, Audrey, which would you take up per-

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manently, home economics or electrical engineering?"

Then they began to sing. Robert, who had a fine baritone voice, linked arms with Audrey, after coats had been resumed and aprons discarded, with various splashings accompanying the washing of hands. "We'll lead the march to the piano," he said, starting the song which Audrey had been singing that morning, the "Song of India." "The only trouble about this song is that it is not written by a native of India," he stopped to say.

"Who did write it?" inquired Audrey.

"A Russian. Don't ask me to pronounce his name. It's from the Legend of 'Sadko.' We have the music, and I'll get Nancy to play it."

"I like the words—they're different from those I was singing this morning. I heard some of Mother's friends sing it in India and I thought it so pretty that I learned some of the words."

"I suppose that the translations are different. 'Who counts the hidden treasures of our mountains? Who counts the gems and pearls within our seas? The untold wealth of India's shore?' "

"I like that," said Audrey, "but some way I like

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that last line the other way,—'Of distant India, wondrous fair.'"

There was a bit of feeling in Audrey's voice as she sang the phrases softly on their way to the other room. "You are a little homesick for it?" asked Robert. "I think that you wear something from 'within our seas,'" and Robert nodded toward the ring.

"Yes. I believe that you would be interested in the message that was sent with it. 'Your box brings you the sunshine of India and her sparkling sea water.' I am only homesick, Mr. Russell, for what I had in India, I think. I love the country, but I choose America for my country."

Now they all were in the front room, clustering around Nancy at the piano. "We thought of taking you somewhere, Audrey," said she, turning around before she began to play, "but not everybody could go, so we are sharing you this time with the whole family. See?"

"I'd much rather stay here," replied Audrey. "I can't think of any nicer place."

When Audrey's little watch showed the hands creeping toward ten o'clock, she said that she must go. Tentative efforts had been made before, but they

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kept her, Harry and Billee blinking to keep awake. By being unusually good they had obtained permission to stay up.

While Audrey was telling Mrs. Russell that she never, never could tell her how much she appreciated their making a birthday dinner for her, Verne said to Robert, "I'll take her over."

"No, my dear brother, it is better for me to do it this time," Robert replied. "There will be other opportunities for you."

Verne grinned. He tried to think up some brilliant remark suited to the occasion, but he decided that he was too sleepy to be witty and whistled a strain of the "Song of India" under his breath.

Safely to her door Robert delivered Audrey, and Durga was there to open it. Moti was waiting in Audrey's room, but Audrey told her to go to bed. "I see that you have everything ready for me, Moti, and I know that you are sleepy. I'll not need you. I had a wonderful time and I will tell you all about it tomorrow. Goodnight, Moti."

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CHAPTER X.

ADVENTURES IN FRIENDSHIP.

THIS birthday dinner was only the beginning of good times for Audrey. Not that she was foolishly engaged or neglected her studies; but there were greetings over the hedge and pleasant little plans, something afoot for the next Saturday or after school. The half expected criticism or interference from her cousin did not materialize. She warned Audrey not to let them get tired of her, but beyond that she never seemed to take note of Audrey's running in to the Russell home, and if Audrey did not go of her own accord, she was called over by some one of them, who found it necessary to see her about something.

Audrey saw New York from the top of the 'buses. She ate chop suey in a Chinese restaurant and tried other things with the girls that made her think of the little adventures with her mother and her uncle

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in India. Sometimes Verne went with them, rarely Robert, and it was odd how often they ran across Durga. Audrey came to the conclusion that there was some reason for this. *Was* there something from which Durga was protecting her? She could not imagine what. It could not be from theft, she thought, for she almost never wore any jewelry to speak of. So far the emerald had not been worn in public places, though Audrey could not resist wearing it to school two or three times.

At school it helped to break the ice in several instances, but it had dawned upon Audrey that her own reserve had had not a little to do with her lack of intimates there. She did not need them so much now, but the new friendliness that she felt and the background of people who liked her made her more sure of herself. Norma's little circle became hers among the day scholars. Among the boarders at what was called the "Dorm," there was one charming girl who sometimes invited her to stay to dinner there. This was a new experience to Audrey, who decided to ask her uncle's permission to attend some boarding school before long. The only objection to that would be leaving the new friends.

It was almost a new Audrey that went back and

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forth, so much difference does it make to know that we meet with approval and not criticism. She took a new interest in the activities of her school and was put on the committee to help finish the school annual, soon to go to press.

She rather demurred at this appointment, but Helen Harley, the girl who was her chief friend at the "Dorm," told her that she "simply must." The collection of history and fun was called the Golden Sheaf, and Helen said that Audrey had to help "bring in the sheaves or it would fizzle out, instead of being the finest one ever put out by the school!"

"That is just your little way, Helen, of getting me to do it, but I will, since you are so pressed for time, and so short of help. How did it happen that your committee isn't big enough?"

"Two of the girls left school, and another has been sick most of the time."

"All right, then, tell me what you want me to write for the Haystack and I'll try it."

"Listen, girls,—she calls it the Haystack! Who ever would think that old Audrey would get funny!"

The little circle of the committee laughed and Audrey felt that "old Audrey" settled it. She was one of them!

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More than ever she thought so when certain parts were assigned to her. She spent all her extra time on thinking up what would be good or clever for the Golden Sheaf. Many a chuckle the girls had over some suggestion of Audrey's. She even suggested how it would be possible to give a funny twist to the brief history of herself that would appear with those of her class or society. "I'm not really funny or clever at all, girls," she insisted. "It's only the necessity,—which is the 'mother of invention,' you know."

When it came to making up the dummy, Audrey was begged to stay at the Dorm over the week end, and she secured permission from Cousin Serena to do so. This was more fun than ever, for the girls did not work all the time.

Audrey was paraded around by Helen into different rooms, tasting fudge, or accepting a chocolate from some one's secret store. For Saturday night the committee received permission to stay up beyond regular hours, to work on the dummy. There was a faculty member of the committee, but she said that she could not help them that night. In consequence, the girls planned a "midnight lunch," for did not writers and literary people tie up their aching heads

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and drink strong coffee to get through? They would be starved before they were through without nourishment of some sort!

Accordingly, after dinner on Saturday night the committee assembled and divided the rest of the work to be done. Many pages were already pasted. They had the general arrangement of a former annual to follow, though they made some changes which they thought effective.

In one suite, where Audrey and Helen were, the study table had been cleared and two folding tables set up. Paste and scissors, with the whole paraphernalia necessary, were at hand. Audrey had never before heard of galley proof or a dummy and it was great fun. "This is like making a scrap-book, Helen," she said, carefully measuring. "Where do I put these pictures?"

"We'll make a separate page of that group, I think," said Helen, leaning over from her side of the table to see what Audrey was doing. "Jane, how about putting that snapshot of Audrey on the elephant in the middle? Or the one where she is watching the snake charmers and those horrid snakes?"

"I like the elephant one for the middle best," said

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Jane Calvert, Helen's room-mate. "Audrey, I'm sure that we never had pictures like that for our 'Golden Sheaf Girls at Home' page!"

"It isn't quite fair, because India isn't my home now, and that grinning little girl doesn't look like me as I am now."

"That doesn't make any difference. Yes, they'd all know that for you, Audrey. Is that your father and mother on the elephant with you?"

"It's Mother, but the man is Uncle, and see, there's my father standing below, the one with the case in his hand. He was going with us, but somebody sent for him,—he was a doctor, you know. One of his friends told him to wait a moment and then snapped the picture. I'm so glad that you wanted this for the Sheaf. It will be so nice to have, —Father and Mother, too."

"I'm glad that you're glad," promptly said Helen, "and you see that it makes it all right about its being a home picture, because—" Helen stopped. Perhaps it would make Audrey sad if she finished.

But Audrey herself finished the sentence, with a brave smile. "Because home is where your father and mother are," she said.

"A loud exclamation from the other table in-

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terrupted them. "Oh, I've spoiled the whole thing!" wailed one of the girls waving her shears; and she was the senior girl in charge. "I picked up the wrong proof and I've got part of the juniors in on the senior page of cuts and funny sayings!"

"Tut-tut," said Helen, who was the daughter of an editor. "Anything can be done, Marge. If the juniors are stuck tight just paste the seniors over them and we'll call up the office Monday and get them to run off some more juniors." Helen went around to look over Margery White's shoulder at the mixed page. "Wait," she counciled. "You may want to go on with the junior page, so measure the juniors before you paste over them, and measure off that much on the junior page where you will want it."

Helen was perfectly serious and did not know how funny it sounded to recommend pasting the seniors over the juniors or running off some more juniors. The other girls, not accustomed to editorial affairs, were laughing, and their laughter increased when one of the girls who were working in a suite opposite burst open the door to impart another tragedy.

"What'll we do Marge? Ann has spilled the paste

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all over the faculty and ruined it!" "It" referred to the page.

"Don't ask me," said Margery, making a gesture of despair. "Helen, you'd better go across and see if you can save the faculty!"

Laughing herself at this, Helen hurried over and came back later to report that the faculty were all washed off and that while the page might look better it would do. Making a dummy had its pleasures, but mistakes were sometimes serious, when the time was short. The girls worked away, trying to be accurate and to know what they were doing instead of cutting and pasting recklessly.

"One thing I've learned by this," said senior Margery, holding off a page to look at it, "and that is a greater respect for anybody that makes up a magazine or anything! I also know that it isn't my forte."

"Don't give up too soon, Marge," laughed Helen. "I imagine that all the folks that do it have to learn. Just think of all the signs you've learned, correcting proof. I like it. Dad doesn't seem to be particularly thrilled by it, but I'm going to be the editor of some woman's paper yet."

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"You will be a good one. I'll subscribe now. How about you, Audrey?"

"Put my name down at once. May I write for it, Helen?"

"Yes; I'll let you have a department. How would you like to handle one of those departments that answer letters and give advice, Pearls to the Puzzled, or something like that?"

"Whatever would help you most, Helen," laughed Audrey. "I shouldn't hesitate to try anything under you."

"I thank you," said Helen, with great formality. "Those are cute pages, Audrey. Is that your last one, Marge? I'm through, too. Now for the feast!"

Carefully the precious pages were gathered up. Helen went across the hall to bring those from the other suite, though she was obliged to wait a little while for the last pages to be finished. But the dummy was not complete. It had not been thought best to attempt too much for one evening. "You will just have to stay over with us Monday, Audrey," said Helen. "We need your original suggestions, especially when we come to the left over stuff

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that we simply must have and yet doesn't seem to fit in anywhere."

"My original suggestions are all in your imagination, Helen," replied Audrey to this, "but I want to stay, and I'll telephone out to see if I may."

Instead of hot coffee, the drink of the tired committee was lemonade. Every one had a plate with fresh potato chips, pickles, a slice of meat loaf, a big spoonful of salad and a sandwich, contents to be discovered. A plate of sandwiches was placed upon the table in Helen's suite, now cleared of paste, pages and shears. The extra tables had been removed and the three members of the committee who had been working across the hall joined the main body.

More meat loaf and salad were available. Dessert was of more lemonade, a home-made cake and a supply of salted almonds, good with any course. Helen and Jane, who had purchased the supplies, told of the new delicatessen that they had discovered. "Everything is home-made, girls," said Jane, "and the prices are not so high. I want to pass on the information, for this thing of the higher education,

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girls, without what my brother calls the proper study of '*pietetics*' is a grave mistake!"

"Pietetics forever!" said Margery, the reverend senior of the group.

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CHAPTER XI.

A CHANGE OF CHAUFFEURS.

PERMISSION was secured for Audrey to stay at the "Dorm" until the work of the committee should be completed, as they hoped, on Monday evening. Page proofs would be forthcoming later, but that would be easy compared to getting the dummy ready.

It meant a long, jolly visit for Audrey, for she would not be going home until Tuesday after school. She enjoyed the experience of going to church with the other girls who boarded at the school. It happened to be the same church which her cousins and the Russells attended. Little smiles from Nancy and Retta, a short stare from Verne, who did not risk smiling at a row of girls, and solemn looks from Billee and Harry, who were properly repressed in the sanctuary, greeted her appearance with the dormitory flock. Robert Russell was not with the family.

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Cousin George, to Audrey's surprise, openly smiled and bowed, but Cousin Serena gazed heavenward. Some one sang very beautifully Kipling's Recessional, which pleased Audrey. She was naturally fond of Rudyard Kipling's best verse. His jungle stories and many of his Indian writings were among her books at home.

Audrey did not try to see her friends after church, for under the chaperonage of the teachers the girls all went back to the dormitory together. But Robert Russell passed her in the door of the church, tipping his hat and bowing. "We miss you," he said.

"Do you know that handsome young man?" asked Helen in surprise.

"Naturally, or I wouldn't speak to him," smilingly returned Audrey. "I showed you where the Russells sat, don't you remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is the older brother, Robert Russell. They live right next to us."

"Oh, certainly, that's all," laughed Jane. "The other boy is even better looking. 'Fess up, Audrey. Which do you like the better?"

"Both; but Verne is too busy with his ball team

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and Robert too busy with his university work to be very much interested in any girl,—which is, I suppose, what you mean, though for all I know Robert may have some true love at the university. They are all just full of energy and pluck and the kindest people you ever saw! But I've raved about them before to you, Helen."

"As much as I ever knew you to 'rave,' Audrey. Would you call Audrey's speeches raving, Jane?"

"I'd say that the term exaggerates a little. But Audrey is getting our vocabulary and ways gradually!"

"That is a pretty name, Russell, Audrey C. Russell; h'm."

"Listen," said Audrey. "I'll never tell you anything about my friends again, if *that* is the way I'm treated."

"I'll stop," promised Helen in pretended alarm. "Little Audrey is only sixteen, remember, Jane."

When Tuesday came, there were still some matters for the Golden Sheaf committee to consider. Audrey telephoned that if her cousins did not object, she would stay to dinner and if Durga could drive out for her about eight o'clock she would be ready then. Durga, who had answered the telephone,

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thought that there would be no objection. He would let her know in case she must come home.

From school hours until dinner-time the girls worked. After dinner they had a farewell visit in one of the pretty parlors with music of piano and voice. "I shall miss these lovely evenings, girls," said Audrey, the center of a little group, "and I found that I could get my lessons out here, too. I imagined that I could not study unless I was alone."

"I believe that you have been alone too much, Audrey," said Helen. "We'll see to that next year, won't we, girls?"

"Thanks, Audrey, for letting me wear your ring a while," said Jane, taking the emerald birthday remembrance from her finger and putting it on Audrey's. "I felt like a million dollars!"

Audrey looked at her watch. "I've got to hurry, girls. The car will be here about eight o'clock and it's a quarter of now. There goes your study bell!"

Audrey hurried upstairs with Helen and Jane, to gather together her books, her hat, gloves and wrap, forgetting her umbrella. Goodbyes were said and Audrey slipped down the well-carpeted stairs to wait in the office, where several of the teachers were chatting together. Audrey's English teacher came

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across the room to speak to her, a little attention which Audrey appreciated.

"We should be glad to have you here all the time, Audrey," she said kindly, "but it is much more pleasant for you to have your home here, I suppose."

Audrey did not have an opportunity to reply to that last part of her teacher's remark, for the bell rang in the hall and the maid came in to announce the chauffeur for Miss Audrey Craig.

The English teacher, to finish her conversation, accompanied Audrey to the door. There stood a strange man, well dressed, and apparently, as Audrey could see, with their car. Durga could not come, Miss, and asked me to drive the car out for you. I have work somewhere else, but if you will come right away, I will not be late."

This is not our chauffeur, Miss Boyd," said Audrey, "but it is our car, I see. I've forgotten my umbrella," she continued, addressing the stranger. "Wait just a minute till I run up to get it."

Audrey ran upstairs and Miss Boyd, shutting the screen upon the waiting man, went back to the office. "Telephone to Mr. Avery, May," she said to the girl behind the glass screen of the inner office. "Ask if it is all right to send Miss Craig with a strange

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chauffeur." Miss Boyd looked out at the man, who was pacing nervously across the stones at the entrance, and looking down the street occasionally.

The office girl could not get the Avery residence, but Audrey, detained a moment by Miss Boyd, said that it was probably all right. Miss Boyd, however, felt doubtful and accompanied Audrey out to the car. The impatient chauffeur hurriedly opened the door for Audrey to enter; but Audrey, after one look, whirled away. "No!" she exclaimed under her breath. "It is not our car! I will wait till they get my cousin by telephone."

The man gave Audrey an ugly look. Miss Boyd said afterwards that she thought he wanted to pick Audrey up and put her inside in spite of herself. But although it was getting dark, there were people passing and Audrey was no light load for a resisting one.

"I am sorry," Audrey politely added, increasing the distance between the car and herself, and shrinking toward the protecting teacher, "but you can see that not knowing you I can't go!"

"Suit yourself," said the man, getting into the car and driving away without another word.

"Was he afraid to wait for the telephone mes-

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sage? Or was he just angry that you would not trust him?" Miss Boyd queried. "That remains to be seen, doesn't it? We'll go in and see if May has gotten your people on the line yet."

Back at the office again they learned that Mr. Avery had answered the telephone message. "He said that your chauffeur is on the way after you."

Now, could that mean the man who called, or Durga? Audrey wondered. "In any event, we are on the safe side," Miss Boyd assured her. There was, of course, the possibility that Durga had had some accident and had sent this man in haste. Miss Boyd consulted her watch. It was only eight o'clock then. "I will wait with you, Audrey. We can see you home in a taxi, if necessary. Don't worry."

Five minutes always seems a long time with nothing to do, but it was ten when Audrey heard a car enter the short drive. Looking out of the office window, she saw Durga! "It's Durga, Miss Boyd!" she exclaimed.

The office girl was almost as deeply interested in the affair as Miss Boyd. She closed the inner office and followed the two into the hall. The maid was opening the door by that time. "Ready, Miss Craig?" said Durga, touching his cap.

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"Did you send some one for Miss Audrey a little while ago?" asked Miss Boyd.

"No, madam; did some one call?"

"Yes, but fortunately Audrey did not go. She will explain. Goodnight, Audrey. If you had not refused to go yourself, I had just decided to run the risk of detaining you."

"I was caught in traffic," said Durga, "or I should have been here some ten minutes earlier, perhaps."

Durga put Audrey into the Avery car and inquired in his quiet way about the make of the car, what the man looked like and what he had said.

"The car was of exactly the same make. I did not think of looking at the number; besides, I never remember what our license number is. But when he opened the door, some way I knew that it was not ours, although the upholstering was exactly the same shade. But perhaps it was that the pocket we sewed up wasn't in the right place, or didn't have the look of being mended. Anyhow, I knew that it was not ours. What do you suppose he wanted, Durga, to carry me off, regular kidnaping, or did he want my ring? I saw him glance at it. I hadn't put on my gloves, just to ride home this warm night."

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"I think that he wanted the ring," said Durga. "At the same time, there is kidnaping done. It is always safe to do what you did; and your cousin has told you never to get into an automobile with any one whom you do not know."

"Yes, of course; but I came nearly doing it this time!"

"I am not sure that it would be safe, even if the message came from your home, Miss Sahiba."

"It would be easy for thieves to send a made-up message, wouldn't it? Well, I'll remember, Durga."

Home was reached at last. After all, it was good to get back to her own room, with its precious contents of things that she loved, and Moti was a comfortable person to have around, especially when a possible narrow escape had just been averted.

As soon as she removed her light wrap and hat and had handed her books over to Moti, she went down to the parlor to see her cousins. Cousin George rose courteously, though he did not always do that for Audrey. "We have missed you, Audrey," he said. "Have you had a pleasant visit?"

"Yes, sir; a little longer than I expected. I am glad to be at home." And Audrey meant what she

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said, though once she would not have thought it possible.

Why did they telephone from school? Were you afraid that Durga would forget to come for you? He understood that you would not be ready till about eight o'clock, I think. He had left the house when the girl called me."

"Yes, he came almost right away. It really was unnecessary to have called, but they look after such things."

"That is very proper. I did not mind being called." Cousin George resumed his paper, while Cousin Serena asked about the Golden Sheaf and what it was. Audrey had once told her all about it, but she explained it all over again with patience and told her cousin about some of the girls and the good times. She was so glad that she had not ben obliged to answer Cousin George's first question, that she felt quite voluble about other things.

Tomorrow she would see "the girls," that is to say, Nancy and Retta, and the rest of the family, perhaps, for she fully intended to run in there, with all her latest news from the Golden Sheaf. But seeing them again was of chief importance.

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CHAPTER XII.

AUDREY'S DREAM.

It was not unnatural that Audrey should have dreams that night. In their desire to entertain her, the girls had provided so many goodies at which she might nibble that only Audrey's good digestion and ordinarily wholesome eating had kept her from noticing any bad effects. It had been such fun. As she undressed she chuckled at some of her remembrances.

If dietetics, why not "pietetics?" My, that was a good feast! The funny doings in reading proof and making the dummy were worth putting into her diary. Audrey did scribble a little on its pages before she finally retired. Helen was such a dear and knew so much about how a publication like that ought to be. She was "going to dismiss the linotyper—or monotyper, whichever it was—because she knew that he simply committed one sentence

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ahead and then put it down in "any old order, taking 'only' out of its place, putting a whole phrase in the wrong place, and ending the sentence with a preposition!"

Audrey had asked her how she knew and Helen had replied, "copy, my dear, the copy! See?"

Her mind a mixture of the Golden Sheaf, the girls, and the last episode at the school, she fell to sleep and dreamed a dream at some time during the night which she still remembered in the morning.

First she and Helen were correcting proof in the back seat of a car. It was being driven so rapidly that they had great difficulty in seeing the words, which danced before Audrey till she scarcely knew what she was doing. Then she seemed to have forgotten the different marks which she should use, and Helen was trying to show her.

Next, she realized that the car need not go so fast and looked up at the chauffeur. His profile could be seen and she saw that the man was the one who had called to take her home. She tried to scream to Helen that they were being kidnaped, but could not utter a word and presently there came a terrible crash. She supposed that she was killed, but she did not feel uncomfortable.

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Apparently, there was neither car, Helen nor the kidnapper. This was funny. Why, she was in India. She could not remember how she got there and felt very much puzzled. Well, that was all right, she would find her father pretty soon.

It seemed perfectly natural, presently, that her father should come from one of the native huts and take her hand. He had been lost, she dimly remembered, but everything was all right now. They were looking for an elephant. There came one now, swinging down the street without any one at all. But her father spoke to it and it stopped. Again her father spoke to it and it knelt down. Her father lifted her to a cushion on top of the elephant's back; then he lightly sprang up beside her. Audrey felt in her dream as she felt in India the queer sensations of the elephant's getting up. Off they rocked.

At last they came to a palace; no, it looked a little like the mosque at Delhi. No, it was the Taj Mahal. They must be in Agra, but how did they get there so soon? Oh, but she was mistaken. Here she was in a zenana and one of the wives, a little girl that looked like Billee, was putting on her an anklet that jingled as she walked. Audrey liked the tinkling,—but, why, she was barefoot! Where was her

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father? Oh, yes, he was in one of the rooms off the verandah. There was a little sick boy in there and his mother was crying. But Father simply couldn't be in the zenana,—something was wrong.

Audrey tried to take off the anklet, but it wouldn't come off. She looked at her arms and they had bracelets on, as wide as cuffs. Oh, there were earrings in her ears, too, and what was the woman saying, that black-eyed woman over there? "She is the youngest wife and just came!"

Then, indeed, Audrey was having a nightmare! She tried to scream to her father and tried to run, but her feet would not go! She *would* not be a wife in a zenana! But all at once everything was different again. She was in a dark place, with lights of some sort. Her father was there, holding her hand. She seemed to be quite small again and wore a pretty white dress that she remembered. Dark faces were around her, and one georgeously dressed Hindu was talking to her father.

Now Audrey was looking down into a large chest filled with diamonds. How they flashed. Some one told her to put her arm down and find the bottom. She looked at her father and he nodded. He was wearing the emerald ring, she noticed.

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In her dream, Audrey could feel her fingers pushing aside the hard stones as she carefully felt her way down and touched the metal bottom. Then she drew her arm out, finding that the diamonds stuck to it. She started to brush them off over the chest, but just then a hideous cobra raised it's head through the glittering gems, as if through an opening made by Audrey's arm.

"Father! Father!" she cried, and tried to run to him. But something was the matter with her feet. They would not go. Her father drew farther and farther away, with a kind, regretful smile that she remembered. The cobra's coils rose,—and Audrey, trembling, wakened to find Moti beside the bed. Soothing words were being spoken, in Bengali.

"How did you get here, Moti?" asked Audrey, still confused. "Oh, I've had a horrid dream! Did I talk in my sleep?"

"You called out once," Moti answered. "I thought that perhaps the thief had come again."

"No. I suppose I've been having too much candy and stuff with the girls. A snake was getting me, Moti, out in India. No wonder I screamed. I'm all right now, thanks."

Audrey went to sleep again, but she did not for-

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get this dream and thought about it in the morning as she dressed. The girls, the bit of danger, the picture of her people and the elephant, with other memories of India, accounted for its mixed features. The only pleasant thing about it was being again with her father. That was very vivid and very sweet.

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CHAPTER XIII.

DURGA'S DISAPPEARANCE.

It seemed quite like home to Audrey at the school, when she returned for the day's work of recitations, study hours and lunch with the girls. The dummy of the Golden Sheaf had gone to the printers. In between classes there were interesting encounters with her friends and at lunch she was with Helen and Jane.

The day flew, as most school days do. Durga was waiting for her. "I am going to stop right at the Russells, Durga," she said as they turned into the home street. "Please take my books into the house and give them to Moti, or you can leave them in the car, if you like."

"The garage will be locked if I am in the house," said Durga. "I will give the books to Moti."

Audrey slipped out of the car when Durga stopped before the Russell home, and ran across the

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pavement into the yard, but not before Nancy had seen her. When Audrey was climbing the few steps, there was a smiling hostess at the door. "How do you do, stranger?" asked Nancy. "I *wondered* who that distinguished and beautiful maiden was, whose car stopped before our humble dwelling!"

"Much you did!" laughed Audrey. "How are you, Nancy? I feel as if it had been a month since I've seen you or any of the family."

"You can't imagine how we've missed seeing you trail down to see your posies, or stand at your window to wave at us, or come home from school. There's always some one of us to say, 'There's Audrey,' you know."

"That sounds pretty nice to me," returned Audrey, as Nancy put an arm around her and drew her into the hall and living room. There was Billee, putting on her roller skates, as usual in the middle of the floor. "Billee, Audrey will think that you are always either putting on or taking off your skates in here!"

"That's what she *is* always doing," said Retta, coming rapidly from the direction of the dining-room and kitchen, "but not always in the front room."

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"There's lots of room in here," pouted Billee, "and its nearer to the pavement."

"I would suggest that the porch is still nearer," said Retta. "Well, I see that you are still alive, Audrey. Here, let me take your hat and things. You will not need to wear them home from here. Sit down and tell us *everything.*"

"I'd be here all night if I tried to do that," Audrey answered.

"That would be pleasant. You looked very impressive with that bunch from the school, Sunday."

"Now you are making fun, Retta."

"No, I'm not," laughed Retta. "I envied you. It would be fun to go to a school like that for a while. If we lived on the farm still, where we lived when we were real little, we'd get sent away to school. Wouldn't you like that, Nance?"

"I am not sure, Retta," her sister replied. "I think that I like living with the family, and especially in New York. I'm going to take in everything that I can, for fear we'll not stay forever."

"Everything that we have money for, you mean to say, Nance. But I like high school and we have as much of a chance at studies, and more outside activities."

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"Aren't there more things in this world that are wonderful?" said Audrey enthusiastically. "I don't know how anybody could get tired finding out about them! But we've had such fun over that old Golden Sheaf."

"Sit down, Audrey," said Retta again, for Audrey was still standing, swaying back and forth with her arm around Nancy. She did as requested and saw out of the tail of her eye Verne hurrying through the hall and up the stairs.

But in the midst of the recital which dealt with the performances at Audrey's school, Verne, wearing a clean collar and a particularly neat tie, came into the room. It was a crimson tie and Nancy felt in her bones that Retta, the frank, was going to make some remarks about it. As Audrey half rose to say good afternoon to Verne, Nancy took the opportunity to shake her head and frown at Retta, knowing that Retta understood. It would be a shame to make Verne self-conscious about Audrey, and that Verne cared what Audrey thought about him was only natural.

Robert would have shaken hands with Audrey, but Verne only bowed and smiled, more literally grinned, in a friendly way, as he drew up a chair for

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himself. "Thought that you had departed for good," said he. "Did you have a good time with the girls?"

"A great time," said Audrey, "but I am glad to be back, too. It was funny to go out there again today, not to stay. How is the greatest team in the United States coming on?"

"We've beaten two high schools lately, but I told you about those. We are going to beat next Friday afternoon, but it will be a fight. Can't you get out in time to come over?"

"Oh, that would be fun! I never rooted for a team in my life. Perhaps I can get Durga to drive me over."

There was so much to talk about that Audrey was in the back yard, looking at the progress of the garden and making plans for the summer with the girls and Verne, when Robert and his father came home, one shortly following the other.

"Oh, I have kept you girls from helping with the dinner!" Audrey exclaimed. "I'm sorry!"

"No, Audrey. We would have excused ourselves or taken you with us, if it had been necessary," said Nancy. "Our dinner was put in the fireless cooker

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before you came. Mother is watching the time. Rob, Audrey is back at last."

Robert Russell was sauntering around the house from the front as Nancy spoke. "So I see," said he, joining the party. "You have been away to school about two weeks, haven't you?"

"How you like to tease, Mr. Robert," smiled Audrey, "but the girls really missed me, I believe, unless they are gay deceivers. See, I have made too long a visit already. I'd better go before Cousin Serena sends for me."

The girls walked around to the front with Audrey, leaving Verne talking to Robert in the back yard. "There is something unusual about Audrey," said Robert, looking after them. "She lacks that gay assurance that so many of the girls now either have or assume, yet she is very well poised, too,—a little too serious, perhaps, sometimes."

"I rather think," said Verne, "that her life's been a serious proposition part of the time. She spoils a man for these loud-voiced girls that want to do everything that the boys do. If Nancy and Retta ever get that way, I'll move out!"

Robert was obliged to turn aside to conceal a smile at the age and wisdom of Verne's "she spoils

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a man." But he answered, "Yes, if you want a girl to take around that is a lady and will never embarrass you in any way, I'd recommend our neighbor."

"Wait till fall, when I come back from the farm with all my wages in my pocket. Then maybe I'll 'rush' Audrey a little."

"I think that the girls have a plan to take Audrey out to the farm for a while. Think that you can keep looking attractive while you are a farm hand? I'll give you my blessing."

"Any girl that can't stand it to see a fellow work, isn't worth bothering about. Thanks, old man, for the blessing. You'd better wait and see if it is needed. I'm too young to marry."

Verne, dark-eyed mischief that he was, uttered the last sentence in a timid falsetto, with his finger in his mouth, as he turned away from Robert with a movie-taught wriggle of his shoulders.

Robert laughed, told Verne inelegantly to "cut it out," and reached for a ball which lay on the back porch. Verne ran back along the path to a proper distance, and when Audrey gave a look across the hedge on her way, she saw the brothers throwing and catching with great vigor.

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To Audrey's surprise, Moti waited on the table at dinner. "Why, where's Durga?" she asked her cousin when Moti went out into the kitchen after something."

"I have not the least idea," Miss Avery replied. "It is very annoying. He was called to the telephone, Moti said. She answered it and called him in from the garage after he brought you home. He told her that he was suddenly called away and asked her to attend to dinner. Very likely now, just as Durga has learned how to do everything in the way I desire, we shall have to get a new,—butler."

Miss Avery's hesitation was due to the thought that Durga was not merely the butler, but chauffeur and general handy man. Audrey wondered to herself if Durga could be tired of his varied duties, with the additional position of watchman or guard, of which Miss Avery knew nothing. But if so, he would not leave in this fashion, she thought.

Morning came, however, and no Durga had returned. Several days passed. Not a word came from Durga. Audrey asked Moti if she could remember how the telephone message came, and what sort of a person was speaking. "You can often

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tell something by the voice and way of speaking, Moti," said she.

"It was a man," Moti replied. "He said that it was very important to speak to Durga. He gave him some other name, too, but I could not hear it very well."

"I asked Durga once if that was all we should call him," meditated Audrey. "Did the man speak like an educated man or not?"

But Moti shook her head. It was beyond her powers to tell.

Audrey took the street car now to and from school. Mr. Avery caught the car to the station. He did not enjoy driving enough to take out the car himself. It stood in the garage neglected.

No one thought of looking to see whether Durga had taken away his clothes or not until the time passed without word from him. Audrey hoped that no accident had befallen him, and it worried her to think that perhaps some one like the man who had tried to get her to drive home with him had made way with poor Durga.

Finally, one evening after dinner, when Audrey was enduring the customary visit which she tried in vain to enjoy, Cousin Serena said, "George, no one

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saw Durga leave. I think that you should go up to his room over the garage and see whether he took his clothes away or not. Who knows? With all the awful things that happen nowadays, somebody may have—you may even find Durga there. Nora says, though, that there hasn't been a sound from the garage."

"So you thought it best to inquire from Nora?" asked Mr. Avery surprised.

"Yes. I did not care to go up there myself, and I would not send Nora or Moti without speaking to you first. I have been expecting Durga every day, of course. But it has been going on too long. We need a man about the house. We should either find out about Durga and know if he expects to come back, or engage some one else. It is certainly very strange that Durga would serve us in this way!"

Cousin George rose, with his accustomed dignity. "I will go up to the room myself," he said.

"Not tonight, George!"

"Certainly, tonight. Your suggestion that Durga might even be there is enough."

"But it is dark!"

"I have a good flashlight, and the moment I am

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within the garage I shall turn on the lights there."

"It is a dark night, Cousin George," said Audrey, her eyes worried, her imagination leaping ahead. "Let me go with you."

"Do you think that your being there would protect your old cousin?" said Mr. Avery in some amusement. "Come, if you want to, though."

"I believe that I'd wait, George, till you are sure that Nora is out of the kitchen. We do not want her all excited over what her imagination may conjure up."

"Oh, well, all right," said Cousin George, disgusted. "First you tell a man that it ought to be looked into. Then you make a fuss when he starts to look into it. Audrey, will you go to see if all the Irish and Hindus are otherwise employed." Mr. Avery plumped himself down into his chair again and picked up a book, while Audrey, so much amused that she nearly giggled outright, rose to go into the kitchen. Cousin George had some spunk after all.

The light in dining-room and kitchen were out. A light from Nora's room on the third floor shone out over the grass. Audrey could hear Moti paddling about her room upstairs, probably putting out

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Audrey's *robe de nuit* and turning down the covers of the bed before she went into her own room. Moti, too, had a room on the third floor, but there was a little room off from Audrey's, where she had been allowed to sleep when she and Audrey first arrived. Having used it then, and on several occasions when Audrey was sick, she gradually adopted it for her sleeping apartment, by Audrey's desire, for she wanted to have Moti near her.

Audrey was behind in her lessons, with much to catch up tonight, but she was both curious and anxious about what had become of Durga; and although she was growing nervous about it, she wanted to go into the garage with her cousin.

She went back into the parlor and saluted her cousin, who looked from his book as she entered. "I have to report, Sir Avery, that the enemy has taken to cover and that the way is clear."

"Good work, fair scout." The frown cleared from the brow of the commanding officer. Mr. Avery stopped in the hall for his hat, and stalked forth to the side door, Audrey following. On a little table near the turn in the hall a large flashlight lay. This Mr. Avery picked up, for the night was pitch dark and there were mutterings of thunder.

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Without a word he unlocked the garage, admitted Audrey and closed the door. First he glanced into the car, which was empty. Then he started up the stairway, having first turned on the lights. But he carried the flashlight with him, for the light in the room above did not turn on from below.

Audrey waited, her heart in her mouth. What would Cousin George find?

The light came on. There was no sound from Mr. Avery, but she could hear him walking about the little room. "Want to come up, Audrey?" he called presently in a cheerful voice.

Audrey suddenly felt weak, and knew how much she had dreaded the worst. What a goose she was, —to get frightened over nothing! "Yes, Cousin George," she answered, running up the rather steep little stairway.

There was the bed, neatly made. Durga's trunk was there, open. Audrey went over and peeped in. It was empty. "The trunk was unlocked, Audrey, so I opened it. Not a stitch of clothing there, nor in his closet. I should say that he probably went away immediately upon receiving the message, and that he or some one with his key came back some night and took away whatever he wanted. There

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was probably a car waiting somewhere. We shall have a different lock put on the garage now, and hire a new man."

Quietly Audrey and her cousin left the garage, going back to the house to report the facts to Cousin Serena.

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CHAPTER XIV.

MORE ECHOES FROM INDIA.

It was the next morning, very early, that Moti came to announce a man at the back door, a man who wanted to see Mr. Avery. That gentleman was in the hall, taking his hat for departure. Audrey happened to be coming downstairs, prepared to go to school. Breakfast was just over, but Cousin George had reasons for taking an earlier train than he sometimes did. Audrey, too, wanted to stop in the library at the school before her first recitation.

Hanging up his hat again, Mr. Avery went through to the back door, and Audrey, thinking that the call might have something to do with Durga, waited a moment; but as she did not like to follow her cousin and listen to the conversation like some child, she hurried away.

On her return that afternoon, she found a new man in charge. Moti explained what she knew. "He brought papers and *she* looked at them. She

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called by telephone. The sahib said that he could not wait,—she must do it."

Cousin Serena explained more fully, when Audrey found her with her embroidery in the library upstairs, after Audrey had disposed of books and other things, in her room, and dressed for dinner. She ran into the library to look up something in the Encyclopedia. "Oh, how has the day gone with you, Cousin Serena?" she asked.

"It has been a trying day," answered Miss Avery, frowning a little. This change of servants is very upsetting. After our experience with Durga, I was very hesitant about employing another man of the same race." Cousin Serena snipped off a thread of blue silk and turned her work around slightly.

"Yes; I was surprised. I thought it was Durga at first. Does he know Durga?"

"He *says* not. At the agency they sent him here, he says, because they understood that we were from India and preferred the foreign servants! I called up the agency but could not get the number, though I tried several times. George said that he must hurry to the office and would leave it all to me." Miss Avery raised her brows and sighed, as if she were accustomed to such martyrdom.

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"But I called the man whose service Ismar has has just left, and he told me that he was honest and had given good service. He has been in one of these bachelor apartments, it seems, and the employer is going to some outlandish place or other. So I decided to try him, particularly as he seemed anxious about getting a place and was willing to work for what Durga received. Since we *must* have Moti, we might as well have him, I concluded."

As usual, Audrey felt guilty that she was responsible for a servant who was not pleasing to the lady of the house, though she knew in her heart that Cousin Serena was delighted to have Moti's services and made the most of them. "Well, Cousin Serena," she said, "when Uncle comes, he will probably see that Moti goes back to her people, for I can't take her to school with me."

Miss Avery looked up, surprised. "I though that you intended to attend the university here," she said.

"It is not decided," said Audrey, who had not yet expressed her desire to her uncle, but felt pretty sure that if she wanted an experience in a girl's school somewhere, he would let her have it. "When he comes for me, I shall know his plans a little better, and we can decide what school I shall attend."

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That Miss Avery did not quite like the idea of the decision's being made without her having some part in it, was quite evident. Her lips closed tightly and she lifted her brows again. Audrey hastened to make amends by adding. "You will have to have a family council over me and I hope that it will not be too much trouble."

"It is never too much trouble to do one's duty," said Cousin Serena, threading a needle with yellow silk. "You must have been surprised. Did Ismar admit you?"

"No, Cousin Serena. I came in the side door, but I heard some one in the dining-room and glanced in. There was Durga, I thought; and I was just about to speak to him, when the man turned and I saw that it was some one new. He bowed to me and said 'salaam' and I said 'salaam,' too, to please him. That was all. So he is to be called Ismar, then?"

"Yes. His name, that is to say, the one he *gave*, is Ismar Mitra. I do not think that he is quite as intelligent as Durga, but he says that he can drive a car and he is willing to take care of the yard this summer, too. I had a talk with him, and Nora will show him about everything tonight. Let us hope that dinner will not be a failure. I am always *very*

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anxious to have George's home life such as it should be, to say nothing of furnishing you with the proper environment of culture."

"That is very good of you, Cousin Serena," murmured Audrey. Audrey did appreciate the refinement of her cousin's home, though having been always accustomed to that, she did not know what its lack would mean. She felt starved for younger companionship and variety, but that she was getting now.

There was only one thing that gave Audrey now a little concern. The birthday mystery had always seemed so delighful, something to be anticipated, the unknown and always interesting gift. But this last experience had made her wonder if there could be something sinister connected with it. If it were not exactly dangerous to her, was it dangerous to those who saw it through? And why? Because of the value of the gifts? This last gift was the only one of high value. Could the emerald have been smuggled in? Did any one want it? Or was there something connected with her? What enemy could she possibly have had in India?

These and similar questions occurred to Audrey. But she did not take them very seriously. She was

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having too good a time. At school there were plans for the Commencement exercises in which she had a part. At home there were the Russells. Cousin Serena did not object to her staying there on an occasional evening, for one of the boys always brought her home the short distance; and sometimes the girls, too, came to the Avery door. It was quite satisfactory to Cousin Serena to have the visiting done across the way; but Audrey took it for granted that she might entertain in her room and often invited the girls there. They did not always accept the invitation, but sometimes, they quietly slipped up the stairs with Audrey. Nothing was ever said, yet there was an understanding that Miss Avery did not like any disturbance. Nancy and Retta felt better if she did not even know of their presence, though they did not feel uncomfortable about being there. Audrey saw to that. The great argument was that Audrey "simply could not go to visit her neighbors so much, if they *never* came to see her."

Ismar did pretty well in satisfying Miss Avery, but it was true that his mentality was not equal to Durga's. Durga was a superior Hindu; Ismar, perhaps, belonged to the serving class. That first

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night at dinner Audrey felt that he was studying her surreptitiously. She felt, almost as if she had been told, that something unusual had taken Durga away and that this man was taking his place in guarding her. Just why she felt this she could not have told. But when Ismar drove her to and from school she noticed how careful he was, how anxious he was to be at school waiting for her at the right time and how he kept track of her movements.

If it had not been for his respectful attitude, Audrey might have been afraid that he represented some enemy or thief; that was out of the question she soon saw. She did not enter into conversation with him, though she said once that she had been worried over Durga. If she had hoped to hear some word of Durga, she was disappointed, for all that Ismar said was in polite assent to her remark.

On Saturday afternoon, when she, Nancy and Retta were taking their Saturday outing on top of a big sight-seeing 'bus, who should come up the winding stairs and pass them to a seat in front but Robert Russell with a friend.

The girls would have spoken to them but for his being accompanied by a stranger. "Who in the world?" asked Retta, staring at the straight back

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of the dark young man with Robert. He was as tall as Robert, with waving black hair, as they saw when both he and Robert pulled off their hats and let the sun shine down upon their heads.

Robert was pointing out with little nods and gestures the interesting buildings and points of the way, as one does to a stranger. The young man with him smiled, showing white teeth, and seemed to be highly entertained by everything. He was dressed in a well fitting suit of fine material. His shoes were shining and his tie was the best of its kind, blue, rather conservative in its mixture of shades.

"Somebody that Rob has picked up at the university, I suppose," said Nancy.

The girls fairly forgot Robert and his guest for a while, but when they were getting off, Nancy stopped near enough to hail her brother softly and receive a "Hello! I wish I'd known you girls were on the 'bus!"

The 'bus ride, lunch together down town and a shopping expedition were the items of joy for that Saturday, a "lark" planned by the Russell girls, and largely for Audrey's benefit, so far as the shopping was concerned. Audrey's new dress was the

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chief objective in the stores. She had discovered from Cousin Serena that a certain sum could be spent for the purpose out of her regular income. The gift from her uncle offered other thrilling possibilities in the way of clothes, for it could either add to the expense of some frock that she coveted, or be spent for the little accessories that really cost so much altogether.

Audrey was so glad to have Nancy's taste instead of Cousin Serena's. She was scarcely aware, of course, what a relief it was to Miss Avery not to have the responsibility. By this time, to be sure, Audrey should have some responsibility herself for her clothing.

Youthful feet and youthful enthusiasm carried them to many different shops, but even they grew tired after the choice was finally made, and how glad they were when some one pulled up to the curb just off Broadway. A lady beckoned. It was Cousin Serena and the new man, Ismar! Nancy and Retta exchanged a glance which meant "We roll home in elegance for once," while Audrey climbed in beside Ismar, and Cousin Serena moved over pleasantly to let the girls sit by her in the back seat.

By Miss Avery's direction, Ismar took them quite

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a drive, while the girls chatted on, regardless of the 'dragon' reputation of Cousin Serena. She, indeed, contributed to the conversation and seemed quite interested in Audrey's account of her purchases. "I am quite grateful to you," she said to Nancy, "for helping Audrey with her buying. It had been so long since I kept any account of the styles for girls that I have sometimes felt at a loss."

"Poor Cousin Serena!" said Audrey from the front seat.

"It really isn't so bad, now," said Nancy, "for Audrey is so grown up; and young and old seem to wear the same things."

"Of that I can not approve," very definitely declared Miss Avery, a volume of disapproval expressed in her tone.

But Nancy, with kind diplomacy, avoided trouble by saying that she and Mrs. Russell would probably agree on the present styles. "Yet there are a lot of them that are sensible and pretty, Mother says, and by being 'conservative,' we manage to look like something and avoid the extremes."

Audrey had the pleasure of hearing her cousin's approval of her friends at dinner that night. "The Russell girls came home with us, George, from

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down town this afternoon," she said. "I was quite pleased with their speech and manner, and Audrey must have chosen quite well under their direction. Her dress is to be delivered next week. I really must call upon Mrs. Russell. They are safe friends for Audrey, I believe."

Audrey felt like waving her fine linen napkin and saying, "Hurrah for the flag," or something equally enthusiastic. Instead, she smiled demurely, and ate an olive, while Cousin George replied, "Very good; very good."

It was going to be hard to settle down to anything that night after a day so full of good times. Lessons were prepared. She could read,—and on that glorious June night! What a shame to stay indoors!

But they were scarcely settled in the parlor for their nightly family gathering when the doorbell rang. After a little delay, Ismar answered it and Audrey heard Robert Russell's voice in the hall. Could the girls have sent for her! Bright-eyed, she waited. Here he was, announced by Ismar, coming to shake hands with Miss Avery, with Mr. Avery, with herself.

Cousin George, with bland dignity, waved Robert to a seat. Cousin Serena, a little doubtful, yet wore

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a look of interest. Robert did not announce the object of his visit at once, but talked without embarrassment, in a friendly way, making a good impression Audrey could see.

Yes, he was the one who was attending Columbia; hard work, but very interesting. Yes; probably he would enter the same line with his father. In these few minutes of conversation between Robert and Mr. Avery, Audrey learned more about Robert's ambitions and purposes than she might have heard in some time. Mr. Avery knew of Mr. Russell through different friends. His firm considered him an authority, and that in a "city that demands the best."

"That is good of you to tell, me, Mr. Avery. Father was always experimenting along electrical lines, but he does not claim to be an Edison. The firm has put him where he has plenty of responsibility. But I came over, Miss Avery, to see if you will spare Audrey to us for a while. I promise to take good care of her and bring her home at any hour you say."

Neither Cousin George nor Cousin Serena were proof against this attractive young man, even if they had wanted to be. Certainly Audrey could go.

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Cousin Serena, indeed, even forgot to set the time.

The shade trees cast thick shadows along the street as Audrey walked along by Robert Russell. Moonlight, starlight, and the less romantic, but more immediately important electric lights beamed above them. "I'm taking you to the park, first, Audrey, if you don't mind," said Robert, "because I want to talk to you."

This was quite thrilling. What of such importance had Robert to say to her? Nothing sentimental entered Audrey's head, though receiving the courtesies which he extended so naturally did contribute to her growing regard for him. If he thought Audrey unusual, so she thought him the ideal of unaffected manliness.

"Did you notice the young man who was on the 'bus with me today?" Robert asked after casual remarks about the fine night and the great time reported by his sisters on their trips about the city with Audrey that day.

"Yes. We girls all spoke of him. Is he from India and attending the university?"

"You have it. I might know that you would recognize the race. More than that, he is a prince, but I have to tell you that in confidence. There are

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reasons, it seems, why it is not best for him to pose as the son of a maharajah. He has been in some classes and leaves his servants at home, I believe, except one who is a student with him, perhaps more of a guard, I guessed from something he said. It is rather an odd situation. He has been here all year, only not in many classes. Now he wants me to tutor him. It seems that my professor recommended me, 'if I could be persuaded to do it.'" Robert laughed as he quoted this. "As my cash account might be improved, I was easily 'persuaded,' Audrey. The boy is interesting, also. He speaks English beautifully and tells me that he has been taught, by an English tutor part of the time, and by Hindu teachers who know English, since he was a little fellow. I don't know how old he is. He looks very mature, but sometimes I think him quite young, not more than say seventeen.

"Seventeen is very old," said Audrey. "I am only just past sixteen, you know and don't you consider me quite grown up?"

"Oh, certainly," laughed Robert. "Please excuse me for hinting that your advanced age is not mature. But you must remember that young ladies

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grow up very fast and always stay at sweet sixteen."

"We shall pass over that, then," said Audrey. "Tell me some more about the young rajah. Have they been giving him travel and all that?"

"Yes. But he has been in New York for some time, as I said. He expects to take courses in Columbia this summer, under my expert advice, aha!"

"I am sure that it will help him," sweetly and earnestly said Audrey. "I know how strange he must feel over here in the midst of such different customs. Does he live at a hotel?"

"No. He has an apartment and a retinue of foreign servants that look after him very well, he says. He is very well informed and knows so much about Indian poetry and philosophy that he could teach me there. I really did not know what learning there is in India."

"Yes; you would be surprised to know many things about the high-caste Hindus. I suppose he told you about a 'babu' somebody that taught him."

"Yes; he mentioned several of them, his teachers. He has had training in 'gymnastics,'—many lines. I'm going to learn a good deal this summer from

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the future prince. He is the one who will succeed his father. He did not tell me this but my professor did. But the reason in particular why I am telling you this is to ask you if you would mind meeting him at our house; for when I told him that I had learned a little about his country from a friend of mine, he asked all about you and wants to see you."

"I shall be very glad to talk with him at any time," said Audrey. "Why should I refuse? I am glad that he can talk English, though. It makes it hard when there is no interpreter, but my father and mother have gotten along pretty well in an emergency even before they knew Hindustani. I have been having Moti talk it to me again. She has been learning English and I have been forgetting the little I know, chiefly Bengali. There are different dialects, or languages, you know, in India."

"All right, Audrey. I'll bring him around some time and send one of the girls for you. Will that be all right?"

"Any time, Mr. Russell."

"As Retta would say, for Pity's sake! I am call-

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ing you Audrey, like the rest of my family. Please remember that I am Rob or Robert to you!"

"Very well," laughingly Audrey assented, "but I wanted to show respect to one so 'mature' and the eldest of the family, to say nothing of being now a distinguished 'babu!' "

"I will get even with you for that," said Robert, bending to look into the somewhat mischievous face beside him, "but if you are good to the prince, I may forgive you. The girls have some sort of a wonderful concoction that they are going to serve after we have a visit and some music. They will not forgive me if I don't take you around pretty soon. You need not mention the walk, I think, for I shall get scolded prettily for keeping you. To be sure, it was necessary for me to visit a little with your cousins, Audrey, and this has taken very little time."

"I see no need for telling all that we know," smiled Audrey. It was fun to have secrets with Robert.

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CHAPTER XV.

AUDREY MEETS THE YOUNG RAJAH.

THE most ordinary life is a mystery. Who knows what is going to happen from day to day? The most quiet heart often conceals what the writers call "suspense," if it is only a desire and hope for something to break monotony. Yet monotony is better than tragedy. But when a girl is young, like Audrey, the adventures of friendship, love, and accomplishment in the life before her, all the happiness that every girl has the right to expect, form a list of bright expectations.

In touch now with a more normal life, Audrey made up her mind to solve the little mystery of why something from the days in India was reaching out into America. If any danger was connected with it, the sooner it was solved the better.

She considered how to go about it and decided to seek Robert's advice. It would only disturb her

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cousins. If Robert thought that his father and mother should be consulted, very well. She even thought that perhaps Ismar could be followed by a detective, but that would take more money than she had. If she could only find Durga and make him talk! If she could get word to him that she would not accept any more gifts!

Her uncle in India was too far away, though he might better know about it, perhaps. She would write to him. He was used to the ways of India.

Meanwhile, Nancy called over the hedge one Saturday, shortly after her school had closed, that Robert was bringing his pupil out on Sunday afternoon, and wanted her to be there. Audrey promised to come. On the same day she received a letter from Col. Craig which brought the good news of an approaching furlough.

"My dear Niece," wrote the colonel. "Your latest report fills me with pride. I am not sure what you will think of my next plans for you, if you are so happy at the school there and have found such pleasant friends next door. How would you like to meet me in England in the autumn, and go back to India with me for the winter?

"By the best of good fortune I may spend the

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coming summer months in my mother country. You know what India is in summer to us!

'Far off the Thunder bellows her despair
To echoing Earth, thrice parched. The lightnings fly
In vain. No help the heaped up clouds afford,
But wearier weight of burdened, burning air.'

"Read your Kipling's 'June' for that. And if you want to know, little niece, how I am feeling now, read 'In Springtime':

'I am sick of endless sunshine, sick of blossom-burdened bough.
Give me back the leafless woodlands where the winds of Springtime range—
Give me back one day in England, for it's Spring in England now!'

"You did not know that your old uncle could grow so sentimental, did you? But it is spring in England now and it may be that by the time you receive this I shall be in the home country. My sending is a little sudden, though I have been ex-

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pecting a furlough. I have a mission there to certain of the high and mighty."

"Now, I remember that I said I would come for you. I did fully intend to come to America and see you hurrahing for the Stars and Stripes, but this business matter makes it impossible. Shall you find it very hard to come over with Moti? You will find your friend Camilla in England, too. We shall not go to India before September or October. I will write you when to come and you will be met at the boat, either by me or some one who will take good care of you.

"I am sending the native costume you suggested for the little girl and putting in a few things that I picked up for you and Cousin Serena. I must tell you, by the way, that I met another of your father's friends recently. I am always running across some one, you know, whom your father saved or helped or won to eternal friendship. This time it was a maharajah, who entertained me for the sake of my brother, the great doctor. It was the Maharajah of——, who inquired about the little daughter of Dr. Craig and asked where you were. When I told him in New York, he said that his son, the future maharajah, is there. They sent him to get

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American travel and some idea of your kind of culture. He will probably send you some greeting."

With a little more, the letter closed. Audrey felt decidedly excited over the prospect it disclosed,—a trip to England and India! How delighted Moti would be! She would very likely leave Moti there when she returned to America, for Audrey fully intended to remain an American.

That evening Robert Russell leaped the hedge when he saw Audrey back in the garden and asked her if it were proper to make a call in that fashion. Audrey, coming up to Robert with her hands full of gay nasturtiums, for the "taboo" was off in regard to Audrey and the flowers, nodded most decidedly. "The Russell family may come in any fashion they like,—just so they come."

"How about just 'me,' regardless of the rest of the family? Don't I get any welcome on my own account?"

"Indeed you do, and I have a lot of things to tell you, besides wanting to consult you about a *great mystery*."

"That sounds interesting. By the way, the girls told you that the young prince is driving out tomorrow afternoon, didn't they?"

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"Yes. I'll be over at the time they set. Let's sit down to talk. Which will you have for your buttonhole, a nasturtium or a rose?"

"Oh, a nasturtium, since your hands are full and 'Cousin Serena' might object to having her roses picked. Not many are in bloom yet, I see."

"No," said Audrey, laughing at the way in which Robert had referred to her cousin. "But Cousin Serena has,—how do they say it?—'fallen' for you all right. I think that she and Cousin George would be pleased if you would come again, and not after me. I don't believe that they have realized how a narrow a circle they have, and now they see me having such a great time with the Russell family!"

Robert was laughing at Audrey's attempt at slang as they sat down under the apple tree on the rustic seat. "I'm glad if we really give you a 'great time,'" he said. "Now tell me about the mystery. I've plenty of time tonight for once, and I made up my mind to spend some of it with you. I can't imagine coming to this house for any other reason than 'after you,' in one sense, Audrey; but if you think that it is best, I'll invade the *sanctum sanctorum* again some evening."

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"Cousin Serena will be delighted, and if she is a little stiff, remember that is only her way."

But now Audrey began to tell Robert all that there was to tell about the mysterious gifts and recent occurrences. "These things that have happened recently make me feel that there must be danger to some one. How it can be connected with the birthday gifts, I can't imagine outside of some one's wanting to steal them.

"My imagination may be at work, but I think that there was some reason why Durga had to leave suddenly, or else he has been hurt by some enemy. And I think that Ismar has been sent in his place. At first I wondered if Ismar could be the one that got Durga away, and I was afraid. But Ismar is taking care of me."

"Have you never had any idea who sent the gifts?" Robert asked.

"Yes. Some time I will tell you about a visit that I made to a maharajah's palace with my father. It was the same maharajah, Robert, of whom my uncle just wrote, and the father of the prince whom I am to meet tomorrow. It is so curious. There was a good reason to think of him when the gifts began to come. Father felt a little embarrassed to

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have me accept them, I think. So when he was called again to the palace when the maharajah was sick, he inquired if he knew about any birthday gifts sent to me; but the maharajah said that he did not. And now, in my uncle's letter, *he* tells how the maharajah *asked where I was*. What would you do, Robert. Do you suppose that danger and everything would stop if I refused to receive any more presents? Or would that seem ungrateful?"

"That might work, perhaps. Do you hesitate to end it?"

"Not so much, though it has been quite thrilling. If I could only find Durga!"

"Well, now let me tell you something, Audrey. I had occasion to go to the prince's apartment yesterday and I could have almost sworn that I met Durga in the hallway. The whole bunch were in Hindu costume. I imagine that our American dress irks them very much sometimes, and you ought to see how the prince looks in his apartment!"

"I know how they dress," smiled Audrey. "But tell me! Could it have been Durga?"

"I'm not sure. I had just a moment's look, face to face, in rather a dim light. Then the man whirled and disappeared through a doorway."

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"That would account for his leaving so suddenly, if the prince wanted him. It might account for the thieves, if the prince lives in all his glory, with jeweled native costumes and all. There might easily some enemies follow him from India, for the thief in my room, and the man in the car were of that nationality, I'm sure. The other man might not have been. But he was probably hired to fix up the package, or slip something into one that he picked up in the store. I told Moti at last, and she said that it was probably something to hurt me. She thinks that the coolie had a snake in among the fruit in that basket that was offered me on shipboard."

Robert was frowning. "That is the limit," said he. "Do you mind my talking this over with the prince, if it seems to be suitable? I can try him out, with a question or two, and see if he knows anything about the gifts."

"That will be a good move, if you don't mind doing it."

"Why should I mind? The important thing is to free you from danger. I can not imagine your father's having any enemies. It might be some

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enemy of the one who is sending you the presents. Have you ever thought of that?"

"Yes, but everything I think of seems so foolish. India can have some dark things going on."

"Then we'll keep you here in America,—though the trouble seems to reach over here! There is one thing favorable. With all these servants of the prince, we stand a chance of finding out who of their countrymen there are in New York."

"Yes," doubtfully said Audrey.

Their conference was broken off by Billee's arrival at the hedge with the announcement that Robert was wanted on the telephone. "All right, Billee," he called, "Be there in a minute. I suppose, Audrey, that we'd better keep to ourselves the name of the Maharajah?"

"Yes. We'll call him the Maharajah of K. Any letter of the alphabet will do. When I tell you all I know about his wealth, you will agree with me that some things had better not be told. I will bring you my uncle's letter when I come over tomorrow afternoon. I'm so full of his plans for my trip next fall that I don't know what to do. Won't it be great?"

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"I am not so sure that I like it at *all* or not. It may keep you in India."

"No," thoughtfully said Audrey, shaking her head. That was nice of Bob Russell to say, but probably he was accustomed to complimenting the girls. He must know many of the university girls, though Nancy and Retta never mentioned any. But they would not know.

The Sabbath came, with church in the morning, dinner between one and two o'clock, after which Moti and Nora would have their time off, though Ismar was elected to drive the Averys out after their naps.

Audrey read for a little while, then strolled back into the garden, from which she was called by Retta's beckoning. "Come on over, Audrey," she called, from the back porch. "The dishes are all done, Mother and Father asleep, and we are just waiting for the grand event!"

In a few minutes Audrey was in her favorite chair in the "front room," which was shaded to keep it cool. The June day had turned warm. Verne and Robert joined Audrey and the girls presently, to be very much interested in the letter which Audrey handed Robert to read aloud.

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Robert stumbled a little when he came to the name of the Maharajah, but he read it the Maharajah of K, as had been agreed and the girls supposed that Kay was a province, if they thought of it at all. "Why, how fine that your uncle quotes Kipling to you. Poor man! He must be homesick."

"Yes; his wife died of cholera at the same time my parents were carried off by it. He may be lonesome even in England."

"But I don't like the idea of your going back there, Audrey," said Nancy. "You will have to become acclimated all over again, won't you?"

"I'll be going there in the winter months, Nancy, and when summer comes if I should stay, we shall go up into the Hills, as we always say. You could call them mountains, but they are the foothills of the Himalayas."

Robert interruped here to say, "Here they are, girls; put on your best smiles for a homesick rajah!"

A very handsome wine-colored car was stopping in front of the house. The young prince sprang out unattended, though he did let the servant open the door for him. Paying no attention to his chauffeur or to the man who had been riding behind him, the

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prince rapidly entered the yard, ascended the steps and rang the bell.

Robert admitted him, brought him into the room and introduced him to the girls as he would introduce any American. But aside from the fact that the Maharajah's son was copying American dress and ways in public, his manner, to Audrey, spoke of India.

A long conversation followed, in which Nancy and the impressed Retta took a proper part, though Robert played the part of host and Verne was very friendly to the stranger. Billee and Harry came shyly in to shake hands. Billee had said to Harry that they must say "salaam," of course, and they had thought of several things that they had heard Audrey mention as among the customs. Fortunately, however, both of them forgot when the time came and they behaved as modestly trained American children should. They soon grew tired of the discussion conducted by their elders and quietly slipped away.

Audrey at last referred to the letter from her uncle and his mention of the prince's father. She spoke of it in such a way that the prince need not take it up unless he chose; but he was at once interested.

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"You know, then, who my father is," he said. "As I am among friends," he continued in his carefully spoken English, "I need not hesitate to refer to my father as the maharajah, but I am sure that Mr. Russell has told his sisters how it is better for me not to be known as the son of an Indian ruler. It would be embarrassing sometimes; sometimes, not even safe." The dark eyes rested upon Audrey.

"But I should like to remind you, Miss Craig, that we have met once, in India."

"Oh! Then you are the little sick boy at the palace!"

"Yes, Miss Craig. Your father was the good doctor who saved my life. I was very sick and very much frightened. One of the servants told me that Doctors came with knives and that I would be cut up. But when your father came in and saw me, he sat down by me, took my hand and began to tell me stories while he felt my pulse or gave an occasional direction, as I know now. He told me about his little girl who was born on the same day that was the date of my birth.

"He asked me if I did not want to be well, and he told me about a great Healer that would be with me all the time, when I was sick and when I was well.

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He would hear the least whisper that I would make to Him. I did not like everything that your father was doing to me, but I could not miss anything that he said, and so, while he talked to me, he put me to sleep. When I woke, there he was, with more soothing words. Your father was a compelling man! He stayed by me, my father said, until I was out of danger, only leaving me when it was necessary for several days. Then I was in the care of an excellent nurse whom he provided.

"It was after a month or so that he came for the last time and to satisfy me he brought the little maid of whom he had told me. My mother then met the little girl, and I think that my father showed her some treasures."

"Yes," said Audrey, who had been soberly listening. She smiled now as she said, "I have never forgotten it. Who could? But my father told me never to speak of it, because the maharajah trusted us."

"That would be like your father. The doctor sahib was a great man; but he would not take as much in payment as my father thought he should have. It was like giving a life, something that per-

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haps could never be paid for, and your father loved India."

"Yes; that is true. Father and Mother had a small income, which was enough. Then my father loved to study and to heal. But when he *would* go down into the plains to the midst of the epidemic, that love took him away from me!"

"I know. And the mem-sahib followed him when she heard that he was ill. You were at Darjeeling?"

"Yes, until it was safe for me to leave the hills. Then they sent me to America."

"If you are like your father, Miss Craig, it may be pleasant for you to know that my mother and I found that Healer of whom he told me. My mother attended one of the schools for a little while just before she was married and was given a Bible there. My father is a Brahmin. It is a great problem to us. He does not know what we really believe, but there is a great love between him and my mother. She was the youngest wife when you were at the zenana, and she has never been replaced by the coming of another. She has great influence, as sometimes women have, even in India!"

"I know," gently said Audrey. "Thank you for

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telling me about my father. Doing a great deal while you do live is what counts, I suppose."

Audrey realized that this brief recalling of days in India was all that was best, since both she and the prince were guests of those that were listening. Her next remark included Robert and the conversation again became general. The prince was known as Ashu Aghore, a name which he had told Robert was fictitious, or a name combined from those of his brothers.

Mrs. Russell came in presently, with apologies for letting her nap detain her too long. Nancy slipped out to prepare some refreshments. Mr. Russell also joined the party. Ashu Aghore, though very young, and even yet strange to American customs, conducted himself with dignity, as a foreign prince should.

With Mr. Russell he was able to discuss Hindu philosophy and literature, from the early Sanscrit down to Sir Rabindranath Tagore. It was surprising how much this young prince had read, either in his own tongue or in English, originals or translations. But since his early boyhood he had been under private instruction, beside a short experience

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at a school. "But it was not safe for me there. My father has an enemy, we think," he said.

Some time later, the car, which had been driven away, returned and was waiting. With gracious acknowledgments, the prince took his leave. Mingling with other cars, that bearing the three Hindus soon was lost to view, though Billee and Harry stared after it from the porch.

Audrey who had noticed the Avery car drive in, announced that she must hurry home; and at that Robert quickly said that he would "see her safely to her door." Retta, who would probably have strolled to the Avery entrance with Audrey, made a comical face at Nancy behind Robert's back, but cheerily told Audrey to "run in without fail" on Monday.

Robert only wanted an opportunity to tell Audrey, he said, that he thought the coincidence of the birthdays significant. "If the Maharajah does not send the gifts, I'll wager that Ashu's mother does. The fact that the prince has to look out for an enemy is another factor. I'm going to look into this, Audrey. Trust me to find out whether Durga is at the rajah's apartment or not!"

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAHARAJAH'S TREASURE

SOME eight years before the events of this story, the unusual incidents, to which the young Hindu and Audrey had referred at the Russell home, had occurred. That Audrey should have dreamed of a cask of diamonds was not surprising, for she had seen one. Always full of beauty, always full of woe, India, on that day which now seemed so long ago, offered Audrey a glimpse of its more romantic and attractive aspect.

Being permitted to accompany her father, the American physician, to the home of an Indian rajah was almost enough in itself; but the offer of a grateful father to show them his treasure vault almost took the breath of the eight-year-old Audrey. The high regard of the maharajah seemed natural enough; for young as Audrey was, she knew that her father's constant and self-sacrificing efforts to

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stem the almost hopeless tide of suffering and ignorance gave him an unusual influence.

Gorgeous in gay, jewel-studded native dress, the maharajah himself accompanied Audrey and her father into the treasure vault, directing his Hindu servants and the guards of the treasure. Demure, but inwardly excited, Audrey walked by her father, her hand clasped in his. To him the maharajah talked in the language of which Audrey understood but little.

Wonderingly Audrey looked around her. It could not be real. This was like one of the fairy stories!

Along the wall were hooks, and on them rested shining yellow bars as long as a yard stick, or longer. "That is gold, Audrey," said Dr. Craig in a low tone, "and in those silver casks there are jewels." The maharajah was explaining, meanwhile.

Why, how many jewels did a maharajah *have?* Audrey's mother had one sparkling diamond in her engagement ring and several small ones in a brooch, —but great casks of them! It was scarcely to be believed.

They stepped close to several casks and Audrey touched the one nearest her with a timid finger. But

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at a sign from the maharajah a Hindu servant was opening the cask; then, indeed, Audrey softly clasped her hands together in amazement. It was a dazzling sight when the lights fell upon the flashing gems,—diamonds!

The maharajah, whose face was not always as gentle as now, leaned forward with a smile and said something to Audrey which her father interpreted. "The Maharajah says for you to see how far you can put your hand and arm into the cask,—yes, right down through the jewels."

Audrey hesitated, raising her fair little face and looking with those deep blue eyes of hers into the face of the maharajah. With his own dark hand he scooped up a dripping, glittering handful and let the diamonds trickle back again through his fingers into the cask. "I should think that it would hurt them," thought Audrey.

But the Maharajah was waiting and Audrey was accustomed to obey. Feeling very careful and a trifle important, Audrey pushed up such sleeves as her white frock possessed and slowly thrust her round, pink-white arm through the gems, making a way with delicate fingers till she reached the bottom of the cask.

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"I feel the bottom, Father," she said in an awed tone, for her arm was buried nearly to the shoulder and the tips of her fingers barely touched the bottom. It was like the stories of Aladdin which her mother had told her.

"Careful not to scatter them," Dr. Craig warned, "when you pull out your arm."

Almost as slowly as when her fingers had made their way through the hard jewels, Audrey withdrew her arm, some small gems sticking to the moist flesh, for the day was warm, a real day of India. Nothing was said by anyone, as she carefully pushed off the stones with her left hand.

But she wanted to do what the maharajah had done and hold for a moment the crystal drops. Putting both hands together she gently gathered a double handful and held them while they flashed for her their varied fires. As gently she let them slip back to the level of the now somewhat disturbed contents.

Again the blue eyes with their long, curling, brown lashes were raised to the maharajah. "Thank you," she said in English. But as she turned her eyes from the Indian ruler, she happened to see a pair of flashing black eyes filled with hate, and she

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suddenly caught again her father's hand and hid her face against his white coat.

"Scared at what you have done, Audrey?" kindly her father asked, but he did not wait for a reply. He and the maharajah walked on and Audrey did not explain why she was frightened. She forgot it, indeed, in the interest of what followed. It was nothing, it seemed, to open a cask of diamonds. Beautiful emeralds, glowing rubies and the bluest of blue sapphires were in that treasure vault. Entirely forgetful of herself, Audrey happily looked and looked again, as one receptacle after another was opened to show them the wealth of the ruler. If it was a dream, it was a beautiful one, and that little sick boy, who wanted to see her, could have any of these that he wanted!

Jewels of less value, many of which Audrey did not know, were like those which she had seen in the decorations of the temples. Dr. Craig briefly named the more valuable gems for her.

A smaller chest, which interested Audrey, contained gems set in odd and characteristically Indian ornaments. Hammered silver, or curiously wrought gold was used in some. Anklets jingled with jeweled bangles. Bracelets were of prettily twisted

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gold wire. Massive necklaces, like ornate collars, looked too heavy to be worn with comfort, and others were exquisite in the delicacy of gold wire and well-set gems. A carved box disclosed some beautiful pearls.

It was somewhat confusing to the little girl, but the Hindu servant kept displaying the ornaments to Dr. Craig and Audrey. The maharajah was talking earnestly to Dr. Craig. From his gestures and the few words which she could understand, she thought that he was urging her father to accept a present. But even at eight years, Audrey knew something of her father's ideas and purposes. These stunning arrays were not for her. She was not surprised to see Dr. Craig shake his head negatively, though with smiles of appreciation and friendship.

Then the maharajah grew more earnest. He seemed to be trying to convince Dr. Craig. From an array of ornaments upon what Audrey called a tray, he picked up a barbaric pin with a green stone and a squat little jar of onyx. These he put in Audrey's hands with words and gestures or argument. "Of not much value," his signs indicated to Audrey, "not half so much as you have done for me,"—and

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Audrey knew what her father had done for the maharajah.

Both men were now serious. Audrey, holding the little jar and the pin, cast a timid glance at the Hindu face which had so frightened her. But the dark profile was all that she could see. The man was studiously expressionless and looked at no one.

Then she watched her father and the maharajah. Her father had yielded. Here were two men in perfect accord on one point, wanting to deal justly and kindly with each other in spite of vital differences in race, religion, philosphy and manner of living. Now they turned to leave the treasure vault, the maharajah and Dr. Craig walking together and talking seriously. Audrey, with her gifts, followed closely, but she liked the expression of the Hindu who watchfully took his place behind her.

Oriental salaams and formality drew the visit to a close and Dr. Craig took his little daughter away.

"I saw the mother of the little sick boy, Father," said Audrey, still excited over the whole experience. "There was another wife that didn't like this one. You could tell."

"Poor prisoners in the zenana! I would not have brought you, Audrey, if there had been any con-

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tagion in this illness. But for some reason they wanted to see the little girl who was born on the same day as the heir of the rajah."

"Did you save the little boy's life, Father?"

"I suppose so. He is almost well now. What do you suppose the maharajah said to me? He said that if you ever needed for anything, either gold or protection, he and his son would give it to you. He so evidently wanted to do more than pay the modest amount I named, that I finally let you have the little things, though he wanted to give you something very costly."

"I am glad that you let me have the pin and this funny little jar. The cover doesn't come off, though. Was the rajah sorry for you because I am a girl?"

"Doubtless," laughed Dr. Craig, "but I wouldn't trade you for any little prince. Do not speak of the wealth that we saw, Audrey. The Maharajah trusted us. Wherever there is wealth like that, there are persons who will seek any excuse to take it away from its owner."

"I will not tell, Father,—except Mother."

"Very good. You see, my child, those treasure chests represent the royal treasury, the Maharajah's

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bank, so to speak. No paper money for him. That is his gold reserve."

To this little Audrey assented, though she did not then understand what a treasury or a gold reserve might be.

The years since then had dulled Audrey's memory a little, except of the scenes, which remained vivid and were occasionally mingled with other things in her dreams, as in the last one. Now that the meeting with the prince had brought it all to mind, other details began to stand out.

Soon she would be again in India. She had no desire to visit a treasure vault, but to see again, with older eyes, would be a satisfaction. Cocoanut palms queer banyan trees, rivers, bamboo clumps, rice-fields, huts and palaces, the officers and their wives, her uncle's friends,—would these have changed much?

There might be Darjeeling again, with its last memories of dear days with her parents. There she had looked off and up at the wonderful Kinchinjinga, veiled with swirling mist or drifting clouds, or clearly showing its snowy outlines in the morning sun. Had the spirits of her father and mother stopped to say goodbye, she had wondered in those

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days of waiting. But it seemed nearer heaven there, at least. New lessons of self dependence were to be learned, as well as the fact that the great Power of the universe could be depended upon to help. To Him she began to take her problems in a new way.

All this Audrey was recalling.

"Audrey is just a little sober since her uncle's letter and meeting the prince," said Nancy to Robert. "I can't understand it exactly, unless she both wants and dreads to go back to India."

"Like the rest of us, Audrey has her moods, no doubt," replied Robert, who imagined that Audrey had been upset by the new developments in the mystery of her sandalwood boxes.

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CHAPTER XVII.

"RUSSELL BABU" INVESTIGATES.

Soon after the public schools closed for the year, there was a great migration to the Russell farm The twins went, of course. Verne, went, because he was to turn farmer for the season and his help would be greatly appreciated in the busy season. Nancy went, because she could manage the twins better thar. any one else. Retta went because she could not stand it to stay in the city if Audrey were on the farm, though she offered to stay for a while with her mother. Audrey went because she was invited, because she was glad to be included and because she welcomed the new experience.

The girls helped their mother get the house in order, most of it to be unused, and they sent off the twins with Verne in advance of the rest. Mr. Russell drove through with all kinds of luggage. The girls and Audrey , however, went by train, to be met

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by Verne with a team and a two-seated wagon. "We have a Ford, Audrey," said he, "but I want you to get into the rural atmosphere at once. This won't be worse than riding on an elephant, anyhow!"

"Oh, I love it, Verne!" exclaimed Audrey. "I can scarcely believe that it is I, having all these grand times!"

The house was an old one of colonial style. Only the farmer who ran the place for Mr. Russell and his wife were there, but another family lived in the tenant house. It was like a new world to Audrey, who helped the girls, when they took hold of the house-work with the farmer's wife, and had great fun rooming with Retta. Nancy took care of Billee, and Verne had Harry in his room at night. The twins were all over the farm, as a rule, but appetite, if nothing else, rounded them up at meal time.

The three weeks that Audrey was to stay extended into six. She wore a sunbonnet, learned to ride one of the horses, helped keep the weeds out of the garden and found herself in much better condition than she had been since her quiet life at the Avery's began. It was Verne's chance to get acquainted with Audrey and he made the most of it, though he was at the age when he liked to tease all the girls. In

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the evenings they often had long drives in the Ford machine, and occasionally they went to what Nancy said was the "worst movie place in the United States," though the pictures were as a rule clean, if old, films. But it was more fun to have a sundae in the delicatessen of the little town so near and to do more driving in the cool air.

Picnics were possible on the shore of the lake, though Verne was too busy to get off in the daytime very often. To Nancy he said one day, "I have half a notion to repeat to Audrey what our respected dad said one day, Nancy."

"What's that, Verne?"

"That it would be a shame, with two available boys in the family, if we don't make Audrey a permanent member of it."

"There is such a thing as going too far, Verne. Don't do it. Audrey won't think it funny. It will jar."

"It is flattering, don't you think?"

"So far as Father's opinion is concerned, yes. Are you growing sentimental over Audrey, Verne?"

"I like her pretty well, and old Bob gave me his blessing."

"Verne, I never know whether you are joking or

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in earnest!" cried Nancy in disgust, as she looked at Verne's sober face. It looked as it usually did when he was solemnly perpetrating some joke. "I should adore having Audrey in the family, but I should advise you to consider your youth and the necessary length of an engagement before you offer your heart and hand to any one."

"It ought to be arranged before Audrey goes to India, Nance," said Verne, smiling now. "I might speak to Rob about it. Think of those young English officers over there!"

"Don't worry. Audrey's plans are all for school. She is going to ask her uncle if she may not go to a boarding school or to some regular college where they have a dormitory for girls."

"Zat so? Imagine Audrey as a co-ed. I'll have to talk with her about that."

But Audrey's thoughts, whenever they concerned a young man at all, were with Robert and his plans for finding out the mystery which surrounded the sandalwood boxes of the birthdays.

Robert, meanwhile, lost no time in communicating all the facts which he had learned from Audrey to his pupil, who was concerned over the thought of

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any danger attaching to her. He knew who sent the gifts.

"It looks, Audrey, as if the mystery is about to be cleared up," Robert wrote. "Prince Ashu has not told me yet who sends the gifts, but he says that he knows. I am to go to the apartment some time soon, to see if Durga is there. There is no one by that name in the retinue, but he is probably there by another name. Imagine your humble servant reviewing the native company. They will not know, of course, that I am to be there, and Ashu will call them in on legitimate service."

From Miss Avery Audrey heard that Ismar had taken his leave, though not without a short notice. Audrey remembered that Ismar had seemed very much disturbed when he learned that Audrey was going to the country. Audrey herself had hesitated a little, wondering if she really needed his protection there. It was certainly on her account that Ismar had come into the service of her cousins. Perhaps he would turn up in the country now. If so, how would he manage it?

Ismar did not make his appearance and the happy days went on with no disturbance of any kind. Audrey was even learning to cook a little, just "easy

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things," as she said. Nancy and the farmer's wife were her instructors, while Audrey "played at work," for Audrey well knew that no real responsibility was hers. At the same time she felt that she wanted to help as much as she could, for not a cent of board would the Russells take, yet the girls urged her to stay on, and Verne feigned tears one day when she asserted that she really must go.

Then she heard from Miss Avery that she and her brother were going to the shore for two weeks. "Now you will *have* to stay, Audrey," joyfully Retta declared. "What would you do back there with nobody but Moti and Nora, and ten to one Nora will take a vacation?"

"Moti is going with Cousin Serena," said Audrey, laughing. "Cousin Serena says that I may come with her, if I feel that I have stayed long enough here."

Matters had already been put in motion for the trip to England. Audrey and Moti were to sail the last of August, according to Col. Craig's last instructions from England.

Considering everything, Audrey was persuaded to stay a little longer. Next they received word that Mr. and Mrs. Russell were driving up for the week end, the week end that the Averys would arrive home,

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and Audrey might drive back with them if she liked; for Miss Avery had written to Mrs. Russell to thank her for Audrey's pleasant summer and to say that she expected Audrey as soon as they returned.

"The only trouble about nice times," said Billee, "is that they don't last."

"But think how monotonous life would be, Billee," said Nancy, "if we did the same things all the time."

"There are some things that I'd always like to do," returned Billee, unconvinced.

Audrey had not heard from Robert for some time, but she had decided to tell the girls all about the latest developments. They had a delightfully mysterious time about it one evening in the hammock under the elms in front of the house. "You should have told us before, honey," said Nancy. "Then we would have been on guard against the enemy!"

"The enemy hasn't found me out here, or else the prince has had him despatched by the trusty scimitars of his retainers! Really, that is no joke, girls; for any criminal subjects of the maharajah might well tremble in their boots."

"The Girl from India ought to know," Retta remarked.

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Great preparations were made at the farmhouse for the coming of Mr. and Mrs. Russell. The girls all hoped that Robert would surprise them by coming, too. Audrey helped with the baking and brewing, always done on Saturday anyway. After the noon dinner, they all dressed in cool and becoming frocks to await the arrival, but it was late in the afternoon when from the cool shade of the elms they saw a handsome car come speeding down the road in their direction. "Girls!" cried Retta, "that is Prince Ashu's car! They have let him bring them!"

Nancy's mind jumped to their preparations and was wondering if they were sufficient for more guests than they had expected, when the car stopped. To Audrey's surprise and satisfaction, the chauffeur was Durga!

Nor was Durga trying to conceal his identity now. He saw Audrew watching him, as he started to drive around back of the house after the occupants of the car had left it. With more of a smile than she had yet seen Durga wear, he bowed to her and touched his cap.

The hospitality of the house was at once offered, but the travelers had just come from a hotel at the last large town and were neither hungry nor tired.

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They settled down under the trees to be regaled with lemonade and cake, imparting the news that the prince and his servants were driving on after a little conference with Audrey. This was one of their customary week end trips about the country. Learning through Robert that his father and mother were going to the farm, Prince Ashu had urged them to try the comfort of his car for that distance.

Audrey had a pretty good idea in regard to what the conference with her would mean. She was to find out all or at least a part of the mystery. Durga was here. That could mean only that he had a good reason for leaving the Avery service, also, that in some way, so she thought, the whole story of the adventures was a connected one.

After a general visit of the whole party, during which the usual kind courtesy of the Russells was shown to the dark Hindu prince, Mr. and Mrs. Russell withdrew, with the girls, saying that they would return after a little. This was to give the prince the opportunity to talk to Audrey, she knew; and Robert, who remained, laid a detaining hand upon her arm to keep her from following the rest. "Ashu wants to see you, you know," he reminded her. "I thought that it would be best if the whole family was not

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present, with all the distractions that Billee, for instance, could invent. Shall I go, too?"

"Oh, no! Please not, Robert! There is nothing that I would not want you to hear. I've told you everything—except all about one thing, and I imagine that the prince will refer to that, my visit to the maharajah's palace, you know."

There was a little delay and more detached conversation when Nancy came out bringing a fresh pitcher of lemonade. Audrey said, "Stay,won't you, Nancy?" but Nancy shook her head in the negative. "I can't. There are things to do at the house. But we'll all be back in time to say goodbye when the prince feels that he must go."

The ice clinked in the big glass pitcher as Robert poured out the cooling liquid and filled their glasses. "I suppose, Ashu," said he, "that the mystery of Audrey's sandalwood boxes and her birthday surprises is all solved by this time?"

"Yes, Mr. Russell," replied the prince. "What I did not know Durga has supplied. I deeply regret, Miss Audrey, that you have ever been in danger through me. I did not know that."

"I am sure that you did not," murmured Audrey, as Ashu paused and looked at her with his regret

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expressed in his eyes. "Nothing ever really happened to me, to hurt me; and then for a long time I had no idea that there was any danger at all. Then, after I began to wonder, I fancied that Durga had been sent to protect me and that Ismar was afterwards sent in his place."

"I have just found that to be true," replied the prince. "But first you may prefer to know who sent the gifts and why, though you would think at once that some one grateful to the doctor sahib must have done so. Naturally you were right. It was my mother, who felt, like my father, that the life of the boy who was to rule in my father's place, some day, had been almost given to them by your father. The case was so desperate and good doctors had been brought in before; but it was the great doctor Craig who made the correct diagnosis, performed the necessary operation and cured me. I want you to understand this, because knowing the wealth of my father's house, you will not feel that these little gifts were much. They were only to please you and surprise you, as well as please me, also, with the knowledge of them.

"It was when I was growing strong that my mother suggested this, gifts to the little girl who was

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born on the same day. I had seen her that one time when her father, the great doctor, had brought her.

"That was how it began. My mother had many pretty things that my father gave her. He gave her anything for which she asked. It was nothing for him. She and I were to have it for a secret between us; but when your father asked the rajah if he knew of any one who would send presents to his little girl, it occurred to my father that perhaps my mother had done so. She told him, then, all about it.

"Durga had been taking the little sandalwood box which my mother prepared each time, and shortly before you left India he found out that some one was trying to thwart us. It grew into a danger, but neither my mother nor I knew that. My father would not spoil our pleasure. He would protect you, as he had promised your father.

"I have told you that my father loves my mother, and that no new wife has come to the zenana since she came. I have taught her English, and when you come to India with your uncle, Miss Audrey, I hope that you will see her. I will arange it with your uncle."

"I shall be ever so glad to come to the palace again. I remember your mother. She was kind

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and there were tears in her eyes when she spoke of you."

"After my father found out, through Durga, that there was some unknown danger, he told my mother that he would see to having the gifts sent to you after she had prepared them; and my mother told me, I remember, how kind my father was about it.

"We knew nothing, then, though we missed Durga, that he had been sent to watch over you. Through Durga that basket was thrown over into the water. Do you remember?"

"Yes," said the interested Audrey. "Was Durga the coolie?"

"No; but Durga directed the coolie. He followed you all through that journey to America,—by land and sea. Although the maharajah has had many suspicions, he has not known which one of the enemies which a ruler has was at the bottom of this, not until now. Durga was pledged to secrecy by my father. He was to watch, to find out, to tell my father, but never let my mother nor me know that anything was wrong. This Durga has just told me and only because I showed him a letter from my father in which he said that he wanted me to know very soon about his enemies as well as his friends,

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and more—that influenced Durga. Then, Durga had found out and he wanted me to send the word to my father.

"There was jealously in the zenana, Miss Audrey. The oldest wife was—strange. I know now that she wanted me to die and hated you and your father because your father saved me. My mother grew afraid for me at last, and my father sent this older woman away. But a relative of hers was serving my father. Durga has only recently found out that he is a relative of hers and that he has been our chief enemy. There was another reason, beside the jealousy of the oldest wife, why this man was embittered by having to serve my father, but up to the present he has managed to conceal his enmity."

As Ashu spoke, Audrey was recalling the look of hate in the eyes of the Hindu, the look which had so frightened her on that day so long ago, in the midst of the maharajah's treasure.

"When Durga ran after that thief who climbed into your window, he caught him, snatched your necklace from him, but forgot the rest when he saw who he was. He was very young and of Durga's people. Angry as Durga was and feeling that all the agents of some one unknown were unsafe,

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Durga yet stayed his hand and told the man that he would set him free if he told who was back of all this.

"The young Hindu was exhausted and wounded and told everything. It is not best for you to know, I think, everything that has been done or attempted. It is all over. Cunning and dreadful things can be done to injure an enemy. These they knew. But Durga and Ismar have discovered what agents of this enemy were in this country. They will not trouble you again.

"You must have been quite perplexed when Durga disappeared." The young prince smiled quite mischievously as he said this. "I was the one to blame for that. I happened to see him, and ordered him into my service with some enthusiasm, for I knew Durga's faithfulness at home."

"I was worried," said Audrey. "I was afraid that somebody had hurt Durga."

"Durga, knowing that we were here, was trying to avoid being seen; but when I saw him accidentally, I had his whereabouts traced and I sent for him. He must have had to think quickly to tell me a story that was satisfactory. I think that I received the impression of his having recently landed in New

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York. He had to send secretly for his clothing, and he was worried when his message to Ismar, a cousin who came to America with him, was delayed. Fortunately, nothing happened to you in the mean time."

This explained nearly everything that Audrey wanted to know. As the prince had suggested, it was not best to know all the cunning and harmful things that had been done or planned. The gift of the thirteenth birthday, the prince said, had been successfully stolen by their enemies, while it was on the way. Something harmful must have been inserted in an ordinary package of stationery that day in the store, when Audrey had joined her friend Norma and returned the package which the stranger had handed to her.

"It was so late when my father found out about the missing birthday gift that he told neither my mother or me, Durga said. Durga waited, expecting it, and after some time he notified the maharajah." So Ashu explained: but he rose to his feet now, clapping his hand together for his servants, as his custom was.

Retta and Nancy, who had been sitting with Mr. Russell on the porch of the farmhouse, now came

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down the walk and across to the elms, Mr. Russell following. The rest gathered, while the prince with his customary courtesy thanked them for their hospitality and was duly thanked in turn.

While they talked for a few minutes, Audrey took the opportunity to go to the car and express her gratitude to Durga for his care of her and the risks that he took himself.

In a few minutes the powerful car was on its way. The brief visit, with its final unraveling of mysteries was over.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAST SURPRISE

"SHALL I tell everything that the rajah-to-be told me, Robert?" asked Audrey of Robert as he walked beside her to the house, after the departure of their guests and the immediate announcement of supper, held back, because their guests had lingered and yet planned to have their own meal much farther on.

"No, Audrey," said Robert, "I do not think that I would. You ought to have time to think it over, for some of it belongs to the life of the maharajah. I no not feel that I should tell even my family about some of the things that he tells me in confidence."

"That is it," thoughtfully Audrey replied.

"But you will have plenty of time for it. If any one starts to ask anything, and no one ever can tell what Billee will say, just tell them that Robert is only waiting a chance to explode a regular bomb of information!"

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Audrey looked up amused and interested. "Is that so, or just a subterfuge?"

"Indeed it is *so*. Mother and Father know, and that is all. Shall I tell you, or will you be surprised with the rest?"

"Oh, I'll be surprised, too." But some way, Audrey felt a pang of disappointment. It would be something in which she had no part. All these nice confidences with Robert were over now. There was no mystery.

Not a question was asked Audrey at the beginning of the meal, for while the process of filling plates and getting started was going on, other people had comments of their own. Verne was bubbling over with enthusiasm about the big car, which Durga had shown him in all its workings. Billee and Harry had their views of things and Mr. Russell was explaining to the farmer how they happened to know the young Hindu whom Robert was tutoring. The girls and Mrs. Russell, like the farmer's wife, were more concerned in seeing that every one had something to eat than in anything else until that was accomplished.

Then Mr. Russell said, "Robert, you have a piece of news to announce, haven't you? Out with it, lad."

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"Engaged to somebody, Rob?" asked Retta.

"Is Ashu going to pay you a lot more than you expected?" asked Harry.

"Harry is more nearly right than Retta," laughed Robert. Then he looked straight across the table at Audrey. "My news is that like Audrey here, I'm going to India this fall. What do you think of that?"

Audrey's face lit up with delight. "Oh, Robert! Are you really?"

But Audrey's exclamation was lost in a chorus of them, with voices that demanded an explanation of Robert.

"For some unaccountable reason," he said, "Ashu has taken a notion to me. His father has suddenly decided to recall him and offers to have his tutor brought along till we are through with a certain line of work. And I am wanted along electrical lines, also; and since Ashu has so much confidence in me, his father suggests, (not I,) they may have a number of things to offer me there. It is too good a chance to turn down, though I have not my diploma yet. That can be attended to later. I shall only visit the palace regularly, Ashu says, and a place of my own will be provided. I am stunned at

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their generosity, but after Audrey's experience I do not know that I should be. I shall have expenses and a salary."

"You know," Robert's father inserted here, "some of the Hindu rulers are always a little suspicious of their English over-lords. I imagine that they have reason to distrust some American dealers as well. Ashu seems to have picked his man!"

"I am sure that they have picked him very well," said Audrey.

"Thanks," bowed Robert. "I'm glad that I have one loyal friend."

"Say, boy!" Verne exclaimed. "I wish I had your chance!"

"It may be a legitimate chance for Father's firm," said Robert, "though I'll forever stand against exploiting the maharajah for *any* one's benefit. I am to help Ashu select all kinds of American products, in some lines, to be sent across, and I expect to have the time of my life for the next few weeks. Then I'm going to do Europe on the way. Audrey, you will have to tell me what to see!"

"As if you would not know as well as I! But you will come to England then. Oh, I'll give you our address! When are you going to sail?"

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"Shortly after you, Audrey; but I'll not get as far north this time as England. I spoke rashly. I'll meet you in India."

Nancy and Retta were enthusiastic about Robert's going, though Audrey thought that Retta looked rather wistful once. They would like the travel, too.

Robert's proposed trip and the pretty mystery of Audrey's birthdays were the chief subject of conversation from that time until bedtime. During supper Audrey had time to think over the disclosures and to decide upon telling only the pleasant part of them, the kindness of the maharajah and of Ashu's mother, with emphasis upon the surprises. She had brought the treasures with her, not liking to leave them in the city house with the possibility of the family's being away. Now, with Billee so anxious to have every one of the birthdays explained to her, she brought them all downstairs, including the barbaric pin of the green stone and the little squat jar which had been the first present of the maharajah and which she had never shown to any one. With Billee, she sat right down upon the floor and began to decorate the child from the contents of her lap. The sandalwood boxes had been left

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in her bureau drawer, but their contents had been carefully packed in a corner of her suitcase.

Audrey would have been surprised—and not displeased—if she had known what Robert was thinking about as he looked at her. The room was a pleasant one, and the family had gathered in after it was dark outside.

Robert had returned from a little walk about the farm, through a woodland and across the meadows. The impulse which he had to seek Audrey and tell her about everything had just warned him that he was on the brink of what was known on the campus as a "case," something which so far he had escaped.

Well, why not? Who was more lovely than Audrey? She was sixteen and a half, and would be seventeen when they might leave India, perhaps, for the home land. As Audrey had no home life of her own, perhaps that would not be too early for a pledge, at least. His family loved her. He might come home on the same vessel with some chaperoning party that was coming with Audrey.

Robert's delightful meditations in choosing his future wife were interrupted by Billee, who scrambled up from the floor to show him the odd little jar. "Just think, Robert, Audrey's never

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opened this. Don't you believe that there is something in it?"

"There might be, youngster," Robert answered. He went over and knelt down on one knee by Audrey to look at the pin which she handed to him; she was embarrassed by his look and the tender tone in which he spoke to her. She had heard him use it only to his mother. "This was the first one?" he asked.

"Yes. If Billee wants to try it, I don't mind if the vase gets chipped or broken a little. I have so much else. I have supposed that it was just an ornament. Nothing ever rattled when I shook it."

"That wouldn't make any difference," said Billee, in a superior tone. "Wouldn't they pack diamonds so they *wouldn't* rattle?"

"Billee has it all fixed up what is inside," said Verne. Hand it here, Bob. Any wax, or anything to scrape out?"

There was nothing apparent except the very tight fit of the top, if it was, indeed, separate at all. But there was a tiny ring in the top on which Audrey had tugged many years before.

Robert sprang to his feet and gave a hand to Audrey to draw her up. "Let's go to the kitchen

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and get all the implements of war," he suggested. Every one was ready for action and the younger members of the family all trooped to the kitchen where various things were tried, from soaking the top to tapping the whole lightly in the hope of loosening the top.

Nothing seemed to do any good and Verne had just gone into the woodshed for the hammer, when Audrey herself pulled again upon the ring. Up came the little top as if never had it been stuck. OOOH!" squealed Billee. "Let me see! Let me *See*!"

"Billee, Billee," warned Robert. "Remember that the jar belongs to Audrey, Billee!"

But Audrey was already holding the little jar where Billee could see the contents. So full that they would not rattle, the tiny jar was packed with precious stones. The maharajah had had his way!

"I do not know why I did not think of it when I received the little onyx jar on my birthday, the one with the pretty stones! Think how long I have had this! I thought that it was only a pretty little ornament and I've even been careless of it. It might have been forgotten when they packed the things for me. But I owe it to Moti. If Moti wants to come back to America with me, she shall come. I

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don't think that I care much for boarding school any how. I'll go to school here with you girls."

"That will be much better," said Robert with a decision so immediate and so pleased, that Audrey looked at him in surprise. But she dropped her eyes before his.

Billee was holding a few sparkling stones in her hand, fingering them with great care after Audrey had placed them there. "You shall have one for a ring, Billee. Which do you want?"

"Oh Audrey! Do you *mean* it?"

"Certainly I mean it. If it hadn't been for Billee, this jar would be closed yet, and perhaps forever."

"No," said Retta. "The maharajah would have asked you, Audrey, if you had ever opened the little jar."

"Don't be too sure, Retta Russell," said Billee, with some importance, "You can't always tell what will happen! Thank you, Audrey; I believe that I like a blue one."

"That is a sapphire, Billee," said Robert. "Audrey, should you do it?"

"Yes, Robert, and I want Nancy and Retta each to have something pretty of mine. But I think that if those stones prove to be too valuable, some of

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the value ought to go back into India. We shall see. I will find out what the maharajah wanted me to do. Perhaps it was for my education; but I shall have that without these beautiful things to pay for it. They are a bit of treasure that the maharajah let me see in his 'treasure chest.'

" 'Unnumbered diamonds lie within the caverns,
Unnumbered pearls within the tropic waters
Of distant India, wondrous fair!' "

Audrey started singing these words softly, and the rest of them took it up. Singing the "Song of India," they trooped back into the other room to pour the contents of the little squat jar into the lap of the astonished Mrs. Russell, all but one blue stone, which Billee held most carefully.

THE END.

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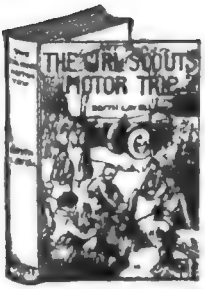

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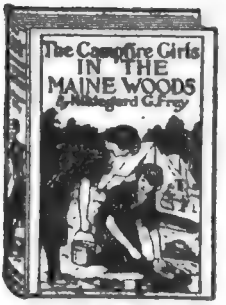

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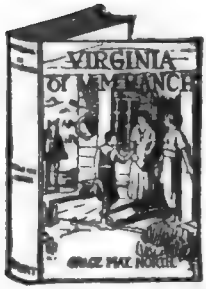

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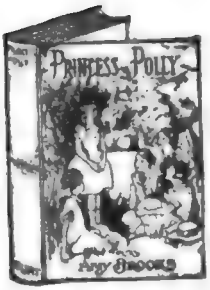

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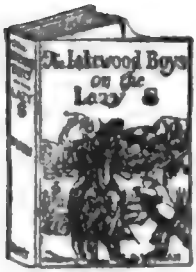

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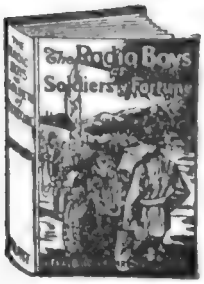

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